DEBATING AND DISCIPLINING SAINTHOOD: POLEMICS ON *WILĀYAH* (SAINTHOOD) *AND KARĀMĀT* (SAINTLY MIRACLES) IN EARLY ISLAMIC HISTORY

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ABSTRACT

Scholars of Islamic history have long recognized the fascinating transition of Sufism from a loose set of distinct tendencies in the third/ninth centuries, to a self-conscious movement which, by the beginning of the sixth/twelfth century, had entered into the mainstream and began to pervade all levels of society. Many have sought to explain the developments in the interim between the third/ninth and sixth/twelfth centuries which resulted in the eventual popularization of Sufism by the end of that period. It is known that instrumental to this process was the rising prominence of the so-called *awliyā' Allāh* ("Friends of God") who before long, were primarily identified with masters of the Ṣūfī path. Given the integration of Sufism into mainstream Sunnī Islam, Sunnī theology came to adopt the miracles of the Friends as markers of sainthood (*wilāyah*). My project seeks a more comprehensive understanding of how this took place, and the challenges that presented against this development. To this end, this project explores the debates on the Friends and their miracles between two opposing camps, the emerging Sunnī-Ṣūfī majority in contradistinction to the Muʿtazilah. I adopt a combination of textual, source-critical, and contextual approaches to Sunnī and Muʿtazilī writings on sainthood from the third/ninth to the fifth/eleventh century and place these sources in conversation with one another to better understand the stakes involved. This project also highlights the discursive nature of the Islamic tradition, with Muslim writers dynamically acting and reacting to one another, and to their social environments, in their attempts to define the boundaries of Islamic thought.

Dedicated to my wife, Sofiyyah, whose unwavering support has enabled me to complete this work. I am underserving of your love and am forever grateful that you choose me as your partner.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Sufism, initially characterized by a pietistic elitism in the third/ninth century,[1] eventually became an international movement for the masses in the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries. By the sixth/twelfth century, Sufism had come to earn the approval of most Muslims at all levels of society, and this coincided with the increasing association of the Friends (*awliyā'*) of God with the masters of the Ṣūfī path. From the fifth/eleventh century until the modern period, the vast majority of Sunnīs, both those who actively pursue the spiritual goals of Sufism and the occasional participant who seeks to benefit from the sanctity of the *walī* by proxy, have confessed belief in the *karāmāt* (miracles) of the Friends, affirming "both their possibility and historical occurrence."[2] The popularization of Sufism is evident in the eventual consensus among Sunnī scholars after the sixth/twelfth century on confession of saintly miracles,[3] a process which had already begun centuries before. Such confessions begin to routinely appear in Sunnī creeds of the fourth/tenth century, such as in that of the famous Sunnī jurist and theologian Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭaḥāwī (d. 321/933): "We [Sunnīs] believe in their [i.e., the Friends] *karāmāt* that have reached [us] via sound transmission through the narrations of trustworthy persons."[4] A great many Sunnī creeds from this period onward seek to invoke

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[1] I follow the convention in scholarship on Islam which uses both the Muslim Hijrī date alongside that of the Common Era. This facilitates an appreciation of the distance between the Prophet Muḥammad's death (632 CE) and subsequent developments in Islamic history. This is especially important for discussions on the earlier part of this history. Thus, throughout this work, whenever two dates are presented side by side, the first will always refer to the Muslim lunar calendar, while the second will refer to the corresponding year in the Common Era. When only one date is presented, this will refer to the Common Era.

[2] Jonathan Brown, "Faithful Dissenters: Sunnī Skepticism about the Miracles of Saints," *Journal of Sufi Studies* 1 (2012): 132.

[3] Thus, the influential modern reformist Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935), in his attempt to discourage excessive interest in the extraordinary, only managed to produce a few names of Sunnīs who questioned *karāmah*, none later than the fifth/eleventh century; see Brown, "Faithful Dissenters," 124. For a comprehensive list of Sunnī works throughout history which confirmed Sunnī acceptance of *karāmāt*, see Brown, 166-168.

[4] Abū Jaʿfar Aḥmad al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Matn al-ʿAqīdah al-Ṭaḥāwiyyah,* ed. Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1414/1993), 84.

the acceptance of saintly miracles as integral to orthodox doctrine. Thus, the spurious *al-Fiqh al-Akbar II* (The Greatest Knowledge, [i.e. theology]), which has been dated tentatively to the fourth/tenth century,[5] states categorically, "the apologetic miracles (*āyāt*) for prophets are unquestionably established, and the miracles (*karāmāt*) of the saints are a reality."[6] Later, Abū al-Maʿālī al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), in his creedal *Kitāb al-Irshād* (Treatise on Guidance), would go on to write that in contrast to the Muʿtazilah, his own party of "the People of the Truth," i.e., the Sunnīs, "accept the possibility of a rupture in the natural order (*inkihirāq al-ʿādāt*) for the saints."[7]

This development is all the more fascinating when we consider that there existed a certain degree of antipathy between some scholars of speculative, reason-based theology (*kalām*) and those Ṣūfīs who first elaborated on the concept of *wilāyah*. As Karamustafa observes, the primary concern of the early Ṣūfīs in the second/eighth and third/ninth was the cultivation of the heart,

> and to the extent that preoccupation with legal and theological scholarship tended to distract one from this central exercise, it was inevitable that they would view the increasingly 'professional' scholarly enterprises with a mixture of caution, suspicion, alarm and, at times, even disdain.[8]

Consequently, Ṣūfīs often spoke of the religious sciences as existing in two broad categories, pitting their own science of the inward, or the esoteric sciences, against those exoteric sciences which relied purely on discursive reasoning, including scholarship on rituals and theology. It is thus ironic that Ṣūfī discourse on *wilāyah* would come to be

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[5] A.J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), 246.
[6] Abū Ḥanīfah (spurious), *al-Fiqh al-Akbar* (UAE: Maktabat al-Furqān, 1999), 5.
[7] Abū al-Maʿālī al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Irshād ilā Qawāṭiʿ al-Adillah fī Uṣūl al-Iʿtiqād*, ed. Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Sāmīḥ and Tawfīq ʿAlī Wahbah (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfah al-Dīniyyah, 2009), 252; cf., al-Juwaynī, edited and translated by Paul E. Walker, *A Guide to Conclusive Proofs for the Principles of Belief* (Reading, UK: Garnet Publishing, 2000), 172.
[8] Ahmet Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 21.

adopted by Sunnī scholars at large, including rationalist theologians, as I demonstrate in forthcoming chapters. Importantly, Ṣūfīs by and large did not dismiss exoteric knowledge. In anticipation of what is to come, it is worth noting here that Ṣūfīs themselves were often trained in the exoteric sciences, and they employed this training towards legitimizing their own esoteric discourses. However, as advocates of spiritual and experiential knowledge, they criticized what they perceived as undue obsession with legal and theological scholarship on the part of some of their scholarly colleagues. In the view of the Ṣūfīs, knowledge of the spiritual was the highest of all and was ultimately inaccessible to discursive reasoning alone. As such, early Ṣūfīs had an unfavorable view of theoretical disputations as the primary source for arriving at Truth. I will return to this point later in discussing the Ṣūfī defense of their discipline as superseding that of others.

Recent decades have seen more scholarly attention on contextualizing Sufism by emphasizing the local in relation to the global, with many scholars treating Sufism in various sociohistorical contexts. These scholars have provided a great service in advancing our understanding of the diversity within Ṣūfī networks, institutions, and practices in medieval Islam beginning in the sixth/twelfth century.[9] Many such scholars have highlighted how distinct local manifestations informed one another in the

[9] Such studies include Nathan Hofer, *The Popularisation of Sufism in Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt*: *1173-1325* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015); Daphna Ephrat, *Spiritual Wayfarers, Leaders in Piety: Sufis and the Dissemination of Islam in Medieval Palestine* (Harvard Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2008); Vincent Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (University of Texas Press, 1998), which focuses specifically on the Jazūliyyah Sufi order through the 15th and 16th centuries; Scott Kugle, *Rebel Between Spirit and Law: Ahmad Zarruq, Sainthood, and Authority in Islam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), a study on the fifteenth century Moroccan Ṣūfī Scholar and Jurist as a quintessential example of the juridical Sufism central to the Sunnī-Sufi synthesis; Richard Maxwell Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur, 1300-1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978); and, Josef W. Meri, *The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), to be considered in tandem with the critical review in Bernd Radtke, "Review of *The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria*, by Josef Meri," *Speculum* 80, no. 3 (2005): 936-938.

continuous formation of a transcultural Ṣūfī discourse, which did not seek to eliminate difference, but rather valued it through the mutual recognition of differing paths to shared or similar goals. Few studies have also focused on the early period with a view to explaining the historical precursors of the proliferation of Sufism in the Middle Period.

Acknowledging the development of Sufism from its relatively obscure origins in the second/eighth century into a full-fledged movement by the fifth/eleventh century, scholars have observed the significance of sainthood (*wilāyah*), both with respect to the self-conception of Ṣūfīs and to the appeal of Sufism to the wider community of Muslims, and have thus rightly focused on early writings on sainthood to explain the spiritual teachings of these early *awliyā'*. However, I contend that the contested and constructed nature of *wilāyah* in this period has not yet been fully appreciated, nor has the significance of *karāmāt* in defining *wilāyah* in the popular imaginary. Though scholars understand that saintly miracles were attendant to the phenomenon of *wilāyah*, the polemics that the Sunnī conception of sainthood-cua-thaumaturgic charisma gave rise to has not been explored at length. In particular, how the synthesis of Sunnīsm and Sufism in this period occurred alongside the adoption of *wilāyah* and *karāmāt* by the majority, in contradistinction to the opposing faction of the Muʿtazilah, has received insufficient attention. It is hoped that this project will contribute towards meeting this need. In what follows, I briefly introduce the two parties that will concern us throughout this study, the Muʿtazilah and the Sunnīs, and then proceed to a survey of the scholarship on *wilāyah* and *karāmah* in early Islamic history.

1.1 The Muʿtazilah

The origins of the Muʿtazilah remains a matter of debate. The most standard narrative (among others) in Muslim heresiography traces the group's roots to its founders

"separating" (*iʿtizāl*) themselves from the circle of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣri (d. 110/728), himself dear to Sunnīs and the Muʿtazilah in common.[10] The Muʿtazilī figurehead, Wāṣil ibn ʿĀṭā' (d. 131/748), it is said, distanced himself from (or, was excused from the company of, and by) his master, al-Ḥasan, by stating that one could not refer to the sinning Muslim in unqualified terms as either a believer or an unbeliever; instead, s/he exists in a "station between two stations" (*manzilah bayna manzilatayn*) of belief and unbelief. This view arose from the thorny issue of the status of a nominal Muslim who commits major sins, and indeed, the Muʿtazilah are known to have settled on the doctrine of the intermediary station in response to that question.[11] Another tradition in Islamic heresiography identifies the early Muʿtazilah with politically neutral groups whose "withdrawal" (*iʿtizāl*) was reflected in a noncommittal refusal to align themselves with any of the competing political factions in early Islam. Lastly, a group of scholars argues that the Muʿtazilah originate from ascetic currents (a position I return to below).[12]

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[10] For different versions of this story, see Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh University Press: 1962), 47-48; on the life and legacy of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, see Suleiman Ali Mourad, *Early Islam Between Myth and History: Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110H/728CE) and the Formation of His Legacy in Classical Islamic Scholarship* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); and Asma Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims: History and Memory* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007), 93-95.

[11] One popular source for this narrative is the heresiography of al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153): Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, ed. ʿAbd al-Azīz al-Wakīl (Cairo: Mu'assasat al-Ḥalabī, 1968), 1:48.

[12] On these genealogies, see D. Gimaret, "Muʿtazila," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 7:783-793; Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 46-55; Racha el-Omari, "The Muʿtazilte Movement (I): The Origins of the Muʿtazila," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 130-141. El-Omari finds that the evidence studied up to the point of her writing had been inconclusive and offers potential sources for further study. For scholarship which argues for ascetic origins for the Muʿtazilah, see Sarah Stroumsa, "The Beginnings of the Muʿtazila, reconsidered," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 13, (1990): 265-93; Osman Aydinli, "Ascetic and Devotional Elements in the Muʿtazilite Tradition: The Sufī Muʿtazilites," *The Muslim World* 97, no. 2 (2007): 174-189; and Florian Sobieroj, "The Muʿtizila and Sufism," in *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, eds. Frederick De Jong and Bernd Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 68-92. This position is supported by Melchert in his critical review of scholarship on Muʿtazilī origins. See Christopher Melchert "Origins and Early Sufism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Sufism,* ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1-23.

Regardless of their origins, we do know that the Muʿtazilah emerged in the first half of the second/eighth century and became the most dominant school of scholastic theology by the early third/ninth century, before Sunnī Ashʿarism later took that position. The Muʿtazilah are perhaps best characterized as pietistic "ethical rationalists" (using George Hourani's terminology) who affirmed that at least some ethical values like "justice" and "goodness" have independent realities which need only be discovered via reason; this contrasted with the view posed by the Ashʿarī's that all ethical values were determined by God and could only be discovered by God's communicating them. For the Muʿtazilah, murder for example, was characterized by an attribute of "injustice," and one could rise to this knowledge via reason alone without recourse to divine revelation; that is, it was argued that a person of sound mind could come to the immoral nature of murder upon reflection, even without knowledge of God having declared this act as immoral. On the other hand, the Ashʿarīs, while not categorically dismissing the human's innate ability to recognize the good/evil, argued that what is morally good/evil is ultimately that which God has decreed as such; one's ruminations on morality must needs be confirmed by divine revelation.[13]

Another famous application of Muʿtazilī reasoning is in their rejection of entitative attributes for God. According to one standard Muʿtazilī understanding, when considering God as both "the Living" and "the Seeing," then God as "Living" must be read as "Living" by a "Life" that is He, and God as "Seeing" is "Seeing" by a "Sight"

[13] Where one falls on this question of course has profound implications for how moral obligations are conceived. For discussions of Muʿtazilite and Ashʿarite views on the nature of moral acts, see George Hourani, "Two Theories of Value in Medieval Islam," *Muslim World* 50 (1960): 161-173; and Richard M. Frank, "Moral Obligation in Classical Islamic Theology," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 11, no. 2 (1983): 204-223.

that is He. These attributes, necessarily, cannot be *separate and distinct* such that each corresponds to an attribute independent of another, Life and Sight, respectively, for that would render "God the Living" as distinct from "God the Seeing." To accept such a distinction, they argued, would entail admitting multiplicity for God who is supposed to be one and utterly unique. Indeed, they argued, to admit the various, potentially innumerable divine attributes as entitative bordered on admitting deities existing apart from *The* God-Essence, a grave error which all parties agreed placed one out of the fold. For the Muʿtazilites, the divine attributes mentioned in scripture were identical and unified in the Divine Being; this avoided both the eternality of anything other than God and the possibility of internal plurality within the Divine Being.[14] For their part, the Ashʿarīs were unanimous in their concern to affirm the attributes as separate so as not to render Qur'ānic references to distinct attributes as meaningless (it is inconceivable, they argued, that references to "God, the Living," and "God, the Seeing," and so on, are mere tautologies); they were likewise unanimous in their reproaching the Muʿtazilah as irresponsibly "denying" the attributes of God. Thus, al-Ashʿarī writes that the orthodox affirm for God attributes like hearing and sight, "not negating them for God, as do the Muʿtazilah."[15]

Historically, the Muʿtazilah are most (in)famous for the *miḥnah* ("inquisition") they helped launch against fellow Muslims who disagreed with them on the contingent nature of the Qur'ān. During the third/ninth-fourth/tenth centuries, in relation to discourse

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[14] The position depicted here was only one among others which all had the basic Muʿtazilite interest in avoiding co-eternal deities existing in the Attributes and plurality within the Divine Being; the solution presented here, which had great success with Muʿtazilites, is attributed to Abu al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf (d. 226/841). See R. M. Frank, "The Divine Attributes According to the Teaching of Abū l-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf," *Le Muséon* 82 (1969), 451-506.

[15] Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, *Kitāb Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa'khtilāf al-Muṣallīn*, ed. Nuʿaym Zarzūr (Beirut: al-Maktabat al-ʿAṣriyyah, 2005), 1:226.

on the attributes of God, the nature of the Qur'ān as God's speech (that is, as reflecting that particular divine attribute) was a contentious issue. The Muʿtazilah argued that the Qur'an is created (contingent, originated in time) even though it has divine provenance; the proto-Sunnīs flatly disagreed; some of them expressed this disagreement by abstaining from indulging in the question altogether, seeing that to delve into this matter lacked prophetic precedence. As they saw it, we have no authority to speak on matters as grave as the eternality of the Qur'ān, when the Prophet himself had not taught anything on the question; the Muʿtazilah, not without good reason, took this abstention as an implicit denial of the Qur'ān's createdness. Other proto-Sunnīs were more explicit in arguing that the Qur'ān, as the speech of God, was eternal (thus uncreated). No matter the case, the proto-Sunnīs were in agreement that the Muʿtazilī stance on the Qur'ān's createdness was unacceptable.[16] For a time, the Muʿtazilah had the caliphate in their corner, and managed to persuade the caliphs to institute an inquisition whereby state-appointed religious jurists would be forced to confess the createdness of the Qur'ān or risk torture. The *miḥnah* was official state policy from 218/833-234/848, after which the caliph al-Mutawakkil abandoned the policy. The legacy of the *miḥnah* furthered the antipathy between Sunnī and Muʿtazilite thought, solidifying the image of the Muʿtazilah as the paradigmatically dangerous heresy in the eyes of Sunnīs, so that they became a group against which the Sunnīs often defined themselves, as we will see.[17] Later in this

[16] On the genealogy and significance of this theological debate, see Wilferd Madelung, "The Origins of the Controversy Concerning the Creation of the Koran," in *Orientalia Hispania*, ed. J. M. Barral (Leiden: Brill, 1974); see also Josef van Ess, "The argument over the Quran," in *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra, Volume 4* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 203-257.

[17] On the *miḥnah*, see now, Josef van Ess, "The *miḥna*," in *Theology Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra, Volume 3* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 483-550. See also, M. Hinds, "Miḥna," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 7:2-6; and Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 48-50.

study, we will have more opportunity to explore Muʿtazilī theology and epistemology vis-à-vis their discourse on *karāmāt*.

1.2 The Sunnīs

Here, I briefly discuss essential components of that group which became dominant in Islam, Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāʿāh (The People of Precedent and Community), which I designate throughout this work either with the emic shorthand of Ahl al-Sunnah, or more commonly, the Sunnīs. As their longer name suggests, the Ahl al-Sunnah saw themselves as preserving the *sunnah* of the earliest predecessors all the way back to the Prophet. *Sunnah* may be translated as "custom," "precedent" or "habitual practice," and in effect, is used by Sunnīs to designate themselves as adhering to normative practice as such, especially of the Prophet, and where that is not accessible, of the earliest Muslims, especially the Companions of the Prophet. The legacy of the Prophet's "companions" (*ṣaḥābah*), particularly in Sunnī Islam, is somewhat analogous to that of Christ's disciples in Christianity as figures who directly witness the Prophet's mission and take on the responsibility of transmitting that mission to subsequent generations. The "Companion" (*ṣaḥābī*) is a technical term in Sunnī Islam which in its mature form, is defined as anyone who met with the Prophet, accepted the Prophet (i.e., was a Muslim) during the latter's lifetime (thus excluding one who became a Muslim only after Muhammad), and died as a Muslim (not having apostatized).[18]

From the third/ninth century onward, the notion of the "Probity of the Companions" (*ʿāḍālat al-ṣahābah*) became a defining doctrine of Sunnī Islam, which

[18] This is the definition of the Companion in its mature form. On how the Sunnī definition of the *ṣaḥābī* developed, see Fuad Jabali, *The Companions of the Prophet: A Study of Geographical Distribution and Political Alignments* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 41-67.

ultimately served to elevate the role of traditions attributed to Companions.[19] It is understood by this party that the morality of the Companions is vouched for by both the Qur'an and the Prophet, so that their individual accounts of Muhammad's life and deeds cannot be impugned on *moral* grounds (i.e., it is not possible that a companion would intentionally lie in providing testimony on the Prophet's life), though they can be critiqued on epistemological grounds. In other words, although a companion is assumed to be morally upright, any given account attributed to a Companion may be faulted on other grounds. Such include evidence internal or external to the account that the Companion has misunderstood the facts on the ground, that s/he had limited exposure to the Prophet such that her account might be doubted on the extent to which it reflects the Prophet's *normative* (as opposed to anomalous) practice, or that those carrying the given tradition have somehow changed it, and more besides. Thus, there was (and remains) debate within Sunnī Islam on what makes a given companion's account and/or deeds admissible and actionable.

Above, I mentioned Sunnī attention to the Prophet's teachings and actions as allegedly reported by the Companions and the earliest generations of Muslims; such accounts were preserved and collected in the literature identified within the tradition as *ḥadīth* (traditions). As Scheiner explains, from the end of the first Islamic century, there was both "scholarly and societal interest" in sayings and deeds of the prophet and other important early figures, which "was accompanied and influenced by the adoption and

[19] For an excellent study on how the "Probity of the Companions" came to define Sunnī Islam, see Scott Lucas, *Constructive Critics: Ḥadīth Literature, and the Articulation of Sunnī Islam* (Brill: Leiden, 2004), esp. Part II.

spread of the concept of *sunnah* within the emerging Muslim societies."[20] In other words, the quest for discovering and then conveying *hadīth* was galvanized by the investment of early Muslims in the practices of their earliest forebearers. A *ḥadīth* then, for the purposes of this work, is a tradition which purports to narrate a statement or action of the Prophet (most ideally), one of his Companions, or an early forebearer within the Islamic tradition. By the end of the first century, *ḥadīth* allegedly reporting sayings and actions of the earliest generation of Muslims began to circulate; this development is bound up with debates on the hermeneutics of elaborating authoritative prophetic guidance. As one can imagine, the preservation of *ḥadīth* became a science unto itself, with the expert in this science identified as a *muḥaddith* (traditionist).[21] Throughout this work, I will use the term "traditionist" to indicate a *muḥaddith,* denoting scholarly expertise in and primary engagement with the Islamic science of authenticating and preserving *hadīth*, regardless of theological inclination. This is to avoid equivocating the *muḥaddith* with members of the *aṣḥāb al-hadīth* ("Partisans of Traditions"), the latter being a term used in both primary and secondary literature to identify a particular tendency in the formative period characterized by preference for textual sources *in contradistinction to* the so-called *aṣḥāb al-ra'y* ("Partisans of Considered Opinion") who, in their juridical-theological deliberations, gave precedence to speculative reasoning (often in light of communal

[20] See Jens Scheiner, "*Hadith* and Sunna," in *Routledge Handbook on Early Islam*, ed. Herbert Berg (New York: Routledge, 2018), 84.
[21] For an introduction to the structure of, and classical approaches to grading *ḥadith* in Sunnī Islam, see Ghassan Abdul-Jabbar, "The Classical Tradition," in *The Wiley Blackwell Concise Companion to the Hadith*, ed. Daniel W. Brown (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2020), 15-38. For an introduction to the western appraisal of this tradition, see in the same volume, Daniel Brown, "Western Hadith Studies," 39-56.

tradition). I adopt this convention to avoid any assumption of an anti-rationalist "traditionalism" associated with the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* for the *muḥaddith*.[22]

The *ḥadīth* in form is comprised of two parts: The chain of transmission (*isnād*) and the text (*matn*) of the report itself. The chain of narration (*isnād*) links the compiler of the *ḥadīth* in question to its point of origin (for example, a companion reporting an action/saying of the Prophet's which s/he witnessed), ideally, by mentioning all intermediaries between the compiler and the origin. The standard format is: Traditionist Z reports from Person Y, from Person X, from Person W, that the Prophet said and/or did [quote]. Consider the following *ḥadīth* which went on to inform certain matters concerning the ritual of fasting:

> According to Mālik [d. 179/795], Ḥumayd al-Ṭawīl [d. 143/760] reported that Anas b. Mālik [d. 93/712] said, "Once, we were traveling with the Messenger of God in Ramaḍān. Those who fasted did not rebuke those who did not; those who did not fast did not rebuke those who did."[23]

This *ḥadīth* is found in a collection authored by the traditionist, Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795), as indicated by the first name in the chain, and was deployed in discussions about whether one who is on a journey is obligated to fast in Ramaḍān.

In anticipating the importance *ḥadīth* will play in our investigation of the growing acceptance of *wilāyah* and *karāmāt*, it must be stated here that the *ḥadīth* became the

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[22] The first argument for this convention can be found in George Makdisi, "Ashʿari and the Ashʿarites in Islamic Religious History I," *Studia Islamica,* 17 (1962): 49. For other reputable scholars who have followed Makdisi's lead, see Christopher Melchert, "Traditionist-Jurisprudents and the Framing of Islamic Law," *Islamic Law and Society* 8 (2001): 386, and Ahmed El-Shamsy, *The Canonization of Islamic Law: A Social and Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 50. For *ra'y* as "considered opinion," see Umar F. Abd-Allah Wymann-Landgraf, *Mālik and Medina: Islamic Legal Reasoning in the Formative Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 4.

[23] For this *ḥadīth*, see Mālik b. Anas, *Kitab Muwaṭṭah Mālik: Riwāyah Yaḥyā*, ed. Muhammad Muṣṭafā al-Aʿẓamī (Abū Dhabī: Mu'assasat Zāyid Ibn Sulṭān, 2004), 3:421= Mohamed Fadel and Connell Monnette, ed. and trans., *al-Muwaṭṭa: Recension of Yaḥyā b. Yaḥya al-Laythī (d. 234/848)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Islamic Legal Studies Program, 2019), 258.

single most important non-Qur'ānic source in Sunnī Islam for conceptualizing and reconstructing the Prophet's teachings. For example, two collections of "authentic" (*ṣāḥīḥ*) traditions aptly identified together as *al-Ṣaḥīḥayn* (the Two Authentic Collections), one each by Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī (d. 256/879) and Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Naysabūrī (d. 261/875), went on to achieve canonical status in Sunnsm and came to comprise the most authoritative sources for Sunnī thought after the Qur'ān.[24] Further, for much of Sunnism, the secondary importance of *ḥadīth* was more so theoretical than actual; in effect, the *ḥadīth* went on to play a greater role in defining the finer details (and at times, the core) of Sunnī thought and practice, since the Qur'ān was silent, or at best, sparing, on many of the issues of theological and ritual practice that arose in the post-Prophetic period, so that the Qur'ān was then often interpreted *in light of* accepted traditions as opposed to the other way around.[25] From the second/eighth century onwards, virtually all Sunnī schools understood *ḥadīth* as essential to defining Islamic thought and practice, though their views differed on which to accept and why. As aforementioned, there was considerable debate in Sunnīsm on how to assess the historical authenticity of *ḥadīth*, e.g., the extent to which we can trust that the Prophet *actually* said or did what is reported of him in a given *ḥadīth*.[26] However, intra-Sunnī discourse on this

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[24] The seminal work on this remains that of Jonathan Brown who has demonstrated that the canonization of the so-called *ṣaḥīḥayn* began approximately between 390/1000 and 460/1070 with the approving assessments and advocacy of notable traditionists like Abū al-Ḥasan Alī al-Dāraquṭnī (d. 385/995) and al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071); see Jonathan Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunnī Ḥadīth Canon* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

[25] For excellent analyses on the instrumental role of *hadīth* in delineating Sunnī creed vis-à-vis that of others, see Wilferd Madelung, "Early Sunnī Doctrine Concerning Faith as reflected in the 'Kitāb al-Īmān' of Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām (d. 224/839)," *Studia Islamica* no. 32, (1970): 233-254; and J. Meric Pessagno, "The Murji'a, Īmān and Abū ʿUbayd," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 95, no. 3 (1975): 382-394.

[26] On classical Sunnī approaches to grading *ḥadith* by way of assessing the chains of transmission, see Abdul-Jabbar, "The Classical Tradition," 15-38. For presentations of Sunnī approaches to determining which *ḥadīth* to implement and why, and the various considerations in this process, see Mohammad

matter is not directly relevant to our discussion and as such, throughout this work, I take a non-committal stance on the authenticity of any *ḥadīth* employed in Sunnī polemics, and instead, am more interested in what they suggest about intellectual trends at the time when they come into wider circulation (at least as far as we can tell). In the second chapter of this work, I will adopt the source-critical approach to *ḥadīth* refined by the late great scholar Harald Motzki (d. 2019) for one specific purpose, to suggest the relatively early provenance of traditions affirming an elite position for the *awliyā'*.

Another important development in Sunnī Islam, which has already been mentioned, is the integration of Sufism into majoritarian thought. In the third/ninth century, a distinct Baghdad Sufism emerged with certain prominent representatives at the head, along with other mystical trends developing around the same time outside Baghdad, particularly in northeastern Iran and Central Asia more broadly. Soon after, Baghdad Sufism began to spread elsewhere and was fused with other mystical trends, which meant that as "correct" doctrine and practice was formulated, certain teachings and practices considered inappropriate would have to be discarded. These included perceived excesses in asceticism such as categorical denunciations of earning a living, this in particular, associated with the Karrāmiyyah of Nishapur (at one time the most active ascetic movement in Iran). Another excess that Sufism would have to be rid of was an attitude of crippling self-censure, as associated with the once-influential Malāmatiyyah, also of Nishāpur. At the same time, the emerging Sunnī-Sufī fusion also involved the adoption of

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Hashim Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence* (Cambridge, UK: The Islamic Texts Society, 2003), esp. Chapter 3. See also Mohamad Hashim Kamali, *A Textbook of Hadith Studies* (Leicestershire: The Islamic Foundation, 2009), esp. Chapter 17. For a concise discussion on Western appraisals of the classical tradition see Daniel Brown, "Western Hadith Studies," 39-56. See also, Kevin Reinhart, "Juynbolliana, Gradualism, the Big Bang, and *Hadith* Study in the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 130, no. 3 (2010), 413-444.

certain doctrines and practices once associated with non-Baghdādī schools, whose early leaders were included in the Ṣūfī imaginary of an encompassing heritage traced to the beginnings of Islam. In this process of self-evaluation and revision, and through developing networks linking these groups together, a self-conscious, international Sufism began to materialize in the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries, and soon after, made its way to the center of Muslim piety and intellectual life.[27] We will turn specifically to how Ṣūfī discourse on *walāyah* is relevant to this synthesis later; here, I only mean to emphasize that soon after their emergence, Ṣūfīs began to take an active part in the formation of Sunnī Islam. The integration of Ṣūfī thought into early Sunnīsm is perhaps best exemplified in the figure of al-Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 298/910), whose importance in Sunnī-Ṣūfī historical memory can hardly be exaggerated.

Al-Junayd, often called *sayyid al-ṭā'ifah* ("chief of the sect") and *shaykh al-mashāyikh* ("master of the masters"), is perhaps the most renowned of the spiritual masters in the eyes of the Sunnī-Ṣūfī tradition. He is primarily associated with promoting a "sober" (i.e., refined, disciplined) Sufism in Baghdad, in opposition to more ecstatic varieties that existed at his time, thus promoting a Sufism more palatable to the broader Sunnī movement. It is not that al-Junayd did not have mystical tendencies and teachings of his own which could be interpreted as heretical by more conservative traditionalists; rather, al-Junayd was adamant that elusive teachings be discussed only with those who could understand them and should be concealed from the uninitiated. He shied away from, and advised his colleagues against, preaching cryptic ideas to the public, and would

[27] My depiction of Ṣūfī history here follows that presented in various standard surveys, including Ahmet Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, 2007, and Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

even write in a code of sorts ("*ishārāt*," subtle allusions) so that only the initiated could understand his work. Al-Junayd became the chief representative of Baghdad Sufism in his time, alongside others like Abū Sāʿīd al-Kharrāz (d. ~286/899) and went on to influence Sufism internationally. Not only did al-Junayd's approach help shape the image and secure the place of Sufism in the public domain, but also, it saved him from trouble when accusations of blasphemy were lodged at certain Ṣūfīs (himself included), as I discuss later. Importantly, as we will see, the most renowned of the Ṣūfī masters, including al-Junayd, were themselves trained in other respected sciences in the Sunnī tradition, including in *ḥadīth*, which thus contributed to the legitimization of Ṣūfī discourse.[28]

In exploring the Sunnī defense of *wilāyah*, this work will also consider Ashʿarī reflections on the subject, and so a few words on Ashʿarism are appropriate here. The Ashʿārī school of theology, as mentioned above, became the dominant theological tradition after the decline of Muʿtazilitite thought in the sixth/twelfth century. The school is traced to its Basran eponymous founder, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/936) who, historical reports explain, initially adhered to the dominant tradition in his own time, Muʿtazilatism, as a skilled student of a towering figure from that tradition, Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbā'ī (d. 303/915). However, he eventually parted company with his Muʿtazilite teachers around the age of forty, having come to adopt the major tenets of Sunnī traditionalists who had long opposed the Muʿtazilah. He went on to serve his new-found

[28] For a brief discussion on al-Junayd's teachings, see Erik S. Ohlander, "al-Junayd al-Baghdādī: Chief of the Sect," in *Routledge Handbook on Sufism*, ed. Lloyd Rigeon (Oxfordshire, UK: Routledge, 2020), 32-45. A more extensive study of al-Junayd's teachings is found in Ali Hasan Abdel-Kader, *The Life, Personality and Writings of al-Junayd. A Study of a Third/Ninth Century Mystic with an Edition and Translation of his Writings* (London: Luzac & Company Ltd, 1962). The latter contains in the same volume, an addendum of various writings by al-Junayd in the original Arabic (Part 3, pp. 1-62 in Arabic numbering), alongside a translation of these writings (Part 3, pp. 121-183).

colleagues by defending their beliefs in the systematic rationalist way of his former Muʿtazilī colleagues. For example, where the Muʿtazilah argued that God is bound to do that which is morally good, the foundations of which, they argued, could be arrived at by reason alone, al-Ashʿarī defended the Sunnī traditionalist view that whatever God commands is by definition, morally good, and whatever He forbids is by definition, evil, and one could only know good and evil by way of revelation alone. Likewise, where the Muʿtazilites denied that the attributes of God mentioned in revelation were distinct attributes co-eternal with God, al-Ashʿarī employed dialectical reasoning in defending the Sunnī traditionalist view that the attributes are co-eternal with, subsisting in God.[29] After Abū al-Ḥasan, later Sunnī Ashʿārīs, including many Ṣūfī writers, would carry on the torch of defending Sunnī traditionalism through dialectical reasoning so that, as we will see in due time, they would also defend *karāmāt al-awliyā'* as Sunnīs assented to their reality.[30]

1.3 Review of Scholarship on Wilāyah and Karāmah in Early Islamic History

Although, as I discuss in future chapters, the concept of *wilāyah* has its roots in scripture, it is primarily due to speculation by mystics after the prophetic era "that a self-

[29] Al-Ashʿārī's view on the attributes of God is of course more nuanced than space here will allow us to explore; Al-Ashʿārī departed from another dominant approach *within* early Sunnīsm which preached, instead of seeking to "explain away" (in their understanding) ostensibly problematic descriptions of God, the mere acceptance of them *bi'lā kayf* ("without [delving into] *kayf"*), that is, without speaking on "modality" (*kayf*). Thus, one could simply accept the Qur'ān's description of God as positioned on the Throne without taking this metaphorically (as would the Muʿtazilah) or seeking to explain the nature/modality of this positioning; one need not confront the attending question of whether this implied spatial location for God. Instead, one accepts the text, and is resigned to the fact that God alone possesses understanding of its true meaning. On this, see Binyamin Abrahamov, "The *Bi-lā Kayfa* Doctrine and its Foundation in Islamic Theology," *Arabica* 42 (1995): 365-79.

[30] On the development of Ashʿarism, see George Makdisi, "Ashʿarī and the Ashʿarites I," 37-80; George Makdisi, "Ashʿarī and the Ashʿarites in Islamic Religious History II, *Studia Islamica* 18 (1963): 19-39. For a synthesis of the research concerning this development, see Jan Thiele, "Between Cordoba and Nīsābūr: The Emergence and Consolidation of Ashʿarism (Fourth-Fifth/Tenth-Eleventh Century)" in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford University Press: 2016), 225-241.

consistent doctrine of sanctity emerged."[31] As many have confirmed, it would appear that the earliest work to exclusively treat *wilāyah* systematically was al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī's (d. ~300/910) *Kitāb Sīrat al-Awliyā'* (Treatise on the Life of the Friends),[32] which receives extensive analysis in this project. In al-Tirmidhī, we find already an attempt to resolve some of the issues that Muslims in the formative period of Islam debated as *wilāyah* emerged. As Karamustafa summarizes, the notion of a distinct set of individuals appointed by God as saints inspired "a number of difficult questions that included (1) the exact nature of the relationship between the *awliyā'* and God; (2) the role of the *awliyā'* in history and society; and (3) the relationship between the *awliyā'* and the prophets."[33] Critics saw in conceptions of *wilāyah* a threat to the rank and authority of the prophets, and most importantly of the Prophet Muḥammad. If the *walī* could claim a special, direct knowledge from God (just as prophets could), and if, like prophets, saints too could perform miracles, then is not the saint equal in rank and authority to the prophet? My exploration of *wilāyah* in tandem with the development of their *karāmāt* will involve all of these questions. We will explore the Ṣūfī defense of *wilāyah* and how Ashʿarī thought was employed to advance this effort. As I discuss later, during the third/ninth-fifth/eleventh centuries, the emerging Ashʿarī school of theology (which became the

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[31] Richard McGregor, "The Development of the Islamic Understanding of Sanctity," *Religious Studies and Theology* 20, no. 1 (2001): 51.

[32] The text is generally referred to in Arabic sources as *Khatm al-Awliyā',* though that title is not used by al-Tirmidhī himself. Radtke argues that the original title of the book was *Sīrat al-Awliyā'*. See Bernd Radtke, "The Concept of Wilāyah in Early Sufism," in *Classical Persian Sufism from its Origins to Rumi*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London: Oneworld Publications, 1993), 484. As the doyen of scholarship on al-Tirmidhī studies, I defer to Radtke's analysis; Bernd Radtke's groundbreaking studies on al-Tirmidhī has provided us with a greater understanding of the development of *wilāyah* as a doctrine. See most especially Bernd Radtke and John O'Kane, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism: Two Works by al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996). This work is an annotated translation of al-Tirmidhī's short autobiography, along with the *Life*. Also useful for understanding al-Tirmidhī's life and teachings including and beyond the mystical is Muhammad Ibraheem al-Geyoushi, "Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī: His Works and Thoughts," *Islamic Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (1970): 160-201.

[33] Karamustafa, *The Formative Period*, 128.

predominant theological school in Sunnī Islam), also accepted the fact of *karāmah*, and thus accepted the challenge of defending the *karāmah* in systematic treatises against their Muʿtazilī foes who, during this transitionary period, persisted in rejecting the *karāmāt*.

Although the Sunnīs and Ṣūfīs came to be divided from the Muʿtazilah, some scholars have it that the Ṣūfīs and the Muʿtazilah share common ascetic-renunciant origins. Sunnī heresiographical sources attest to the presence of a certain faction called *al-Ṣūfiyyat al-Muʿtazilah* (lit. Muʿtazilite Ṣūfīs) in the early third/ninth century, centering on the teachings of Abū Sahl Bishr Ibn al-Muʿtamir (d. 210/825), founder of the Baghdādī school of the Muʿtazilah, some of whose practices mirror those of renunciants in Baghdad, the epicenter of Sufism.[34] Finding that the Muʿtazilah and Ṣūfīs have common origins, Sobieroj explains that

> As the Muʿtazila and the *ahl al-sunna wa'l-jamāʿa* [i.e., the Sunnīs] developed into separate denominations, with the Ṣūfīs by and large being members of the Sunnī community, their common heritage was lost sight of…The Ṣūfīs criticized the Muʿtazila for their disagreement with Sunnī doctrine. As a result, the Ṣūfīs experienced the repercussions of their criticism just as any other Sunnī Muslim might...[35]

This observation is central to my primary object of investigation in this work. It contributes to the observation that medieval Islam saw a fusion between Sufism and Sunnīsm, a cohesive Sunnī-Ṣūfī synthesis which joined forces in addressing debates against their common contender, the Muʿtazilah. In spite of scholarly awareness that Sunnī theologians were developing and defending the concept of *karāmah via* live debates with the Muʿtazilah, scholars have yet to explore in detail the dialectic between

[34] Sobieroj, "The Muʿtazila and Sufism," 69.
[35] Sobieroj, "The Muʿtazila and Sufism," 70. Recall that Ahl al-Sunnah is the standard denomination in the tradition for the Sunnī community; it is a way of self-identifying as following prophetic tradition (*sunnah*) and following the orthodox majority (*jamāʿah*, lit. community).

these two factions on this question, and instead, have focused on elucidating the views of the eventual victors, the Sunnī-Ṣūfīs. For example, in his important article on Sunnī attempts at disciplining acceptance of *karāmāt* (without dismissing them altogether), Brown acknowledges that "faced with Muʿtazilī objections, they [the Sunnī party] had to establish a qualitative distinction between prophetic and non-prophetic miracles."[36] Brown hints at the fact that the Sunnī apology of *karāmāt* comes in response to Muʿtazilite critique, yet given his stated objectives in that work—exploring intra-Sunnī debates on the *scope* (and not the mere existence) of *karāmāt*—the article does not expand on the Muʿtazilite concerns and critique regarding *karāmāt*. In other words, Brown's article brilliantly presents intra-Sunnī anxieties concerning the widespread reach of incredulous miracle stories when the existence of a saintly miracle had become for Sunnīs, a certainty; however, it does not explore what came prior to this point, when Sunnīs were still engaged in debates with the Muʿtazilah on the reality of *karāmāt*. Likewise, other surveys on Sufism, notably those of Jamil Abun-Nasr and Ahmet Karamustafa, show awareness of the Ṣūfī-Muʿtazilī dialectic, but understandably only mention it passing, given their broader interests in the history of Sufism beyond Sunnī-Muʿtazilī polemics.[37]

There are some important exceptions to this trend. First there is Sobieroj's unparalleled article, "The Muʿtazilah and Sufism," which discusses Muʿtazilī attidues toward Sufism in some detail. This article mines the writings of Muʿtazilite social historian, Abū ʿĀlī Muḥassin Ibn ʿĀlī al-Tanūkhī (d. 384/994) to show how Muʿtazilites

[36] Jonathan Brown, "Faithful Dissenters," 143.
[37] Jamil Abun-Nasr, *Muslim Communities of Grace: The Sufi Brotherhoods in Islamic Religious Life* (Columbia University Press, 2008), 52 and *passim;* and, Ahmet Karamustafa, *The Formative period*, 128 and *passim*.

saw Ṣūfīs as tricksters who only fooled the populace with their "*karāmāt.*" Sobieroj's is an important contribution, particularly for the author's unique approach in demonstrating how social "history" in the form of al-Tanūkhī's chronicles on contemporary events and gossip can be purposed toward advocating certain ideological positions (in this case, against Ṣūfīs).[38] In this project, I supplement Sobieroj's work by probing al-Tanūkhī's text for more data on his owns observations (and that of his Muʿtazilite colleagues) on the contemporary phenomenon of wonder-working saints.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

Ṣūfīs of the early third/ninth century could not have predicted the trajectory that Islamic thought would take; they could not have imagined, nor is it clear that they would have desired, that their movement would come to occupy the center of Muslim life by the sixth/twelfth century. Indeed, while early Ṣūfīs clearly sought and worked towards legitimacy in the eyes of the mainstream, exclusivist tendencies in their circles and in their writings (à la the notion that only the few are equipped to traverse the Ṣūfī path) suggest many of them would have been uncomfortable with latter-day popularization of Sufism. It is from this perspective of dynamism and uncertainty with respect to the Islamic tradition, as opposed to one of inevitability, that I look to study this popularization as it begins and as Sufism gains firm footing in Islamic society in the face of sustained opposition from the Muʿtazilah, from the third/ninth to fifth/eleventh centuries. Thus, for example, when reflecting on Muʿtazilī writings on *karāmāt*, we must

[38] Florian Sobieroj, "The Muʿtizila and Sufism," 68-92. For a useful supplement to this work which briefly treats Muʿtazilite approaches to *karāmāt* through other scholars, see Travis Zadeh "Commanding Demons and Jinn: The Sorcerer in Early Islamic Thought," in *No Tapping around Philology: A Festschrift in Honor of Wheeler McIntosh Thackston Jr.'s Birthday*, eds. Alireza Korangy and Daniel Sheffield (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 134-139.

remember that these are produced without the assumption that Sunnī thought would become the unmistakable champion in Islamic thought; instead, there remains some hope for these writers that Muʿtazilism would defeat Sunnism, so that the stakes involved in these writings were quite high.

I will use this historical fact of competition for societal influence between these factions to inform my reading of our sources. Throughout this work, I will be concerned with how Muslims involved in *karāmāt* discussions negotiate their positions through sacred texts. I will attempt to stand somewhere between the grave error of asserting a universal "Islam" and the opposite, but equally grave error of treating the various traditions within Islam as disparate. None of the viable traditions that have emerged throughout Islamic history have done so in a vacuum; instead, each ensures its existence by brushing up against *other* Islamic traditions and presenting its own epistemological approaches to and interpretations of sacred texts vis-à-vis those of its counterparts. One cannot understand Muʿtazilism without looking at how Muʿtazilite thought is shaped by its responding to Sunnīsm, and vice versa. Thus, for example, when discussing the Sunnī defense on *karāmah*, we must keep in mind that Sunnīs are concerned to refute their opponents on this question, and that this informs which arguments they employ, and which become part of the shared Sunnī intellectual arsenal.

This perspective is largely guided by the interventions of Talal Asad in the study of Islamic culture. In his important article, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam,"[39]

[39] Talal Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," *Occasional Paper Series* (Washington, DC: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, 1986), 1-23.

Asad critiqued earlier anthropologists of Islamic societies, notably Clifford Geertz,[40] and Abdul Hamid el-Zein,[41] who, themselves (rightly) eager to correct reifying and essentializing characterizations of Islam, overcorrected with dualistic depictions of Islam (Geertz) or overemphasis on heterogeneity (el-Zein). Geertz followed a popular tendency among anthropologists studying Islam at the time, which posited a distinction between so-called scriptural Islam, and popular Islam. The former was the religion of the urban dwellers and was more puritanical in attempting to adhere to the scriptural, textual foundations of Islam; the latter was the religion found in rural areas, was more ritualistic in nature, and was especially characterized by personality cults (in which local saints were turned to as intermediaries for divine aid and protection). For Geertz, where the former had the doctors of traditional law and theology, the *ʿulamā'*, at the center, the latter centered on the person of the saint and objects connected thereto, including gravesites.[42] El-Zein too, in his emphasis on the local over the global, not only furthered

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[40] Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968; reprint, 1971). This is the first anthropological study to focus exclusively on Islam. In this work, Geertz seeks to overturn the prevailing tendency in orientalist studies on Islam in his time, which explained Islam purely through the prism of scripture and the textual tradition. As a corrective, Geertz's work figured the Islam of the masses primarily as a *living* tradition, embodied in the practices of believers; as such, it does not concern itself with the textual tradition.

[41] Abdul Hamid el-Zein, "Beyond Ideology and Theology: The Search of the Anthropology of Islam," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 6, (1977): 227-54. Here, El-Zein stretches Geertz's emphasis on diversity of practice by refusing to speak of a universal Islam. He seeks to address the now well-known, and yet unresolved question of how to successfully define religion as an analytical category, given that claimants to one religion typically endorse irreconcilably contradictory views. El-Zein concludes that the quest to find a universal "Islam" is futile. Instead, he argues, we can only speak of each singular "islam" (sic). Moreover, el-Zein saw that Geertz unintentionally essentialized Islam, in spite of himself. El-Zein explains that for Geertz, Islam comprises two dimensions, experience (local and personal), and tradition; in other words, Geertz has not gone far enough. El-Zein does not find that we can settle on any shared meaning that encompasses all of Islam. Lived experience is much too dynamic to lend itself to unifying factors, and so any shared meaning or tradition that is sought after would be arbitrary and beyond that, would require a value-laden judgment which effectively excommunicates those believers who do not participate in whatever purportedly unifying practices are identified by the student of Islam. For el-Zein, it is important that all "islams," with their individual claimants, be treated as equal.

[42] For this characterization of Geertz's work, see Asad, "Idea of an Anthropology," 9; el-Zein, "Beyond Ideology and Theology," 232; Mustapha Tajdin, "Understanding Islam between Theology and Anthropology: Reflections on Geertz's *Islam Observed*," *Religions* 13, no. 22 (2022): 4-16.

the notion of a dualistic structure to Islam, but also just about denied the existence of an identifiable, cross-cultural Islam altogether. As he explained, the Islam "of Ulama is highly abstract, formal, and legalistic." The theology of the *ʿulamāʾ*, he states, "is more reflective than popular systems of religious meaning;" as well, that Islam of the scholar "is less ritualistic and less bound to common sense experience and social action" than popular Islam.[43] As many have pointed out, this neat distinction between a popular and a scriptural Islam does not correspond to Islam as experienced by Muslims.[44] As I show in this project, both the popular and scholarly classes were involved in the conceptualization of orthodox thought on sainthood. Throughout this work, I will rely on indigenous scholarly output concerning the *karāmāt*, and when it comes to the Sunnīs, it is within such scholarly works that we find apologies for an increasingly popular phenomenon. Indeed, where el-Zein speaks of scriptural Islam as "less bound to common sense," we will see that in fact, there is a very common sensical approach to the *scholarly* defense of saintly miracles in Sunnī Islam—one recurring argument in this tradition can be summed up as follows: that saintly miracles exist is indubitable simply because just about everyone knows they do.

An important aspect of this Asadian approach to understanding the formation of Islam is the recognition of the role "orthodoxy" plays in the Islamic tradition. Here, the concern is not to prove the merits of one tradition over another as properly, or more "orthodox;" rather, Asad is concerned with the fact that the Islamic traditions sought to *establish* themselves as orthodox. On this, he writes

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[43] El-Zein, "Beyond Ideology and Theology," 241-42.
[44] See Ovamir Anjum, "Islam as a Discursive Tradition: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 2, no. 3 (2007): 656-672.

> orthodoxy is…a relationship of power to truth. Wherever Muslims have the power to regulate, uphold, require, or adjust *correct* practices, and to condemn, exclude, undermine, or replace *incorrect* ones, there is the domain of orthodoxy. The way these powers are exercised, the conditions that make them possible…, and the resistance they encounter (from Muslims and non-Muslims) are equally the concern of an anthropology of Islam…Argument and conflict over the form and significance of practices are therefore a natural part of any Islamic tradition.[45]

In the above, Asad highlights the quest for orthodoxy and the strategies employed therein, identifying such as "power," and marks this as primary in the study of Islamic societies. In the same vein, my work explores the soft power used by the Muʿtazilah and the Sunnīs to advance their positions in their writings. Asad also stresses the importance of competing discourses from within and without in the creation of orthodoxy. In my work, I adapt this theory to study the rhetorical means with which Sunnīs and Muʿtazilites vied in establishing "correct" doctrines vis-à-vis saintly authority and miracles.

Finally, Asad argues that Islam should be studied as a "discursive tradition that includes and relates itself to the founding texts of the Qur'an and the Hadith."[46] For Asad, the perception of coherence with authoritative textual discourses was central to the formation and legitimization of doctrines in Islamic culture; in other words, what counted as authentic religion had to be negotiated through authoritative texts. Muslim competition for the definition of Islam has largely been negotiated through varied perspectives on authoritative texts, so that neglecting texts is to neglect a fundamental part of how Islamic doctrines and practices are legitimized. Thus, textual study must stand at the center, as opposed to the margins, of investigations in Islamic culture. In contrast to other approaches which prioritize material conditions or ritual as practiced without regard to

[45] Asad, "Idea of an Anthropology," 22.
[46] Asad, "Idea of an Anthropology," 20.

theology, to understand religious meaning in Islam, one must be concerned to study how competing factions debated the confines of orthodoxy through the mediation of certain texts and how thereby, certain doctrines were authorized and certain others, circumscribed. Again, there is nothing necessary about what emerges from such conflict; that is, it is not assumed that the form which orthodoxy(ies) will take through engagement with founding texts is predetermined. Rather, conceptions of orthodoxy emerge dynamically through action and reaction to competing discourses. As I demonstrate in this project, this is crucial for understanding how the place of sainthood and saintly miracles was negotiated in Islam.

1.5 Outline

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two sets the ground for the emergence of saintly miracles in Islam by demonstrating that the emergence of this phenomenon was prepared by the ascendancy of the apologetic miracle (*muʿjizah*) for prophets as a concept. As we will see, debates, both internal, and especially interreligious, on the exact means by which prophethood was established prompted Muslims to argue that the deciding factor in establishing prophethood was the appearance of miracles at the hands of claimants thereto. I argue this conviction, initially formulated by the Muʿtazilah, had the consequence of opening the way for miracles to be perceived as the primary external marker of special rank with God, first for prophets and then for the Friends of God. In Chapter Three, I present an analysis of the growth of *ḥadīth* on the *awliyā'* especially between the first/seventh and fourth/tenth centuries and argue that this reflects the coeval ascendancy of sainthood *qua wilāyah* and *karāmah* in Islamic thought. Chapter Four discusses the concept of *wilāyah* as presented in Ṣūfī works from the third/ninth-fifth/eleventh centuries. This chapter will also present the function of the *walī*

as conceived by our writers. Along with al-Tirmidhī's *Sīrat al-Awliyā'*, this chapter will also discuss *wilāyah* as presented in a set of treatises written by Aḥmad Ibn ʿĪsā al-Kharrāz of Baghdād (d. 286/899), collected in *Rasā'il al-Kharrāz* (*Treatises of al-Kharrāz*), Sahl of Tustar's (in modern day Iran) (d. 283/896) exegesis of the Qur'ān, Abū Nasr al-Sarrāj of Baghdād's (d. 378/988) *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ fi'l-Taṣawwuf (The Book of Light Flashes on Sufism)*, and Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhī's (d. 380s/990s, active in Bukhāra) *Kitāb al-Taʿarruf li'Madhhab Ahl al-Taṣawwuf* (*The Doctrine of the Ṣūfīs*).

The objective of Chapter Four is to elucidate the social and intellectual background of the popularization of *wilāyah*. I argue that the polemical nature of these works demonstrates that Ṣūfīs were engaging in a campaign to identify sainthood (*wilāyah*) with their own faction, and in so doing, to establish themselves as the true heirs of the Prophet. Their polemical works were thus a part of the attempt to establish their authority above other factions among the intelligentsia. In Chapter Five, I focus on the Sunnī defense of miracles in light of Muʿtazilite objections. As I show, Sunnīs of the third/fourth-fifth/eleventh, whether or not they were affiliated with Ṣūfī circles, grew up in a world where *wilāyāh* and *karāmah* were increasingly part of lived experience, as reflected by the growing Sunnī consensus on *karāmāt*. I also place this in conversation with Muʿtazilite critique of *karāmah*, relying both on Muʿtazilite theological works, and the chronicles of al-Tanūkhī, the aforementioned Muʿtazilite social historian, to discuss the anxieties that saintly miracles gave rise to in his party. I restrict my study to the first five centuries of Islamic history because it is in the fifth/eleventh century that we find the last great defender of the Muʿtazilī position against *karāmāt*, ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Ḥamadānī (d. 415/1025), whose works we will consult. As I mention later, Muʿtazilites after ʿAbd

al-Jabbār, who still disagreed with Sunnī Ashʿarīs on key issues, nonetheless came to accept saintly miracles, so that their acceptance was by this point, something of an irreversible trend. I follow this, with a concluding chapter which summarizes the progress of Sufism after the fifth/tenth century, the findings of this project, and avenues for future research.

CHAPTER 2: THE *MUʿJIZAH* (APOLOGETIC MIRACLE) AS A PRECURSOR TO *KARĀMĀT AL-AWLIYĀ'* (MIRACLES OF THE SAINTS)

2.0 Introduction

Central to the debate on *karāmāt al-awliyā'* (miracles of the saints) was the task of assuring that the saint could be distinguished from the prophet (see Chapter Five). Absent this distinction, theologians feared scandals involving questions of authority would ensue: might the *walī* be perceived as a successor to the Prophet Muḥammad? could he thereby lay claim to prophetic authority?[47] Future chapters will explore the stakes in such questions and how proponents and opponents of the *karāmah* navigated them. We will see that the concern to properly distinguish between the prophet and the *walī* hinged on the adoption of the *Muʿjizah* (apologetic miracle) doctrine by both sides of the debate on *karamāt al-awliyā'*. In this chapter, I explain how the prophetic *Muʿjizah*, later crucial to the trajectory of debates on *karāmāt*, first developed within Muslim theological circles

By the third/ninth century, both Sunnīs and Muʿtazilītes came to see evidentiary miracles as determining of prophethood. For the Muʿtazilah, all miracles belonged to the

[47] Throughout, I will refer to the *walī* in the masculine because the *walī*, in the early tradition, is basically a male phenomenon when discussed conceptually. There was no established barrier to female sainthood in and of itself, and the texts do speak to the presence of female saints, the most famous of which is probably Rābiʿah al-ʿAdawiyyah (d. c. 185/801). Margaret Smith (1975) has argued that female saints were always recognized at the popular level. Yet, she explains, they barely appear in our texts which treat *wilāyah* systematically. In these "official annals," *wilāyah* was conceived in the masculine, and in the stories and lives provided by our authors, female saints barely receive mention. See Margaret Smith, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1975), 433; see also, Rachid El Hour and Manuela Marín, "Male and Female Saints in Medieval Islam," in *Memory and Presence of Female Saints in Ksar el Kebir (Morocco)* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 1-7; and Margaret Smith, "The Feminine Element in Sufism," in *Mystical Dimensions*, 426-435. For studies on female saints of particular renown from the first centuries, see Valerie J. Hoffman, "Muslim Sainthood, Women and the Legend of Sayyida Nafisa," in *Women Saints in World Religions*, ed. Arvind Sharma (Albany, SUNY Press, 2000), 107-44; and Margaret Smith, *Muslim Women Mystics: The Life and Work of Rábiʿa and other Women Mystics in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). I depart from translating the *walī* in the masculine where context indicates that gender neutrality is intended (this is often the case for the Qur'ān and for certain sayings attributed to the Prophet).

same conceptual category, those which could manifest exclusively at the hands of prophets, Muḥammad being the last of them. Sunnī theologians would come to agree with their counterparts that the *Muʿjizah* did in fact exist and that they were peculiar to prophets. However, Sunnīs argued, the *karāmah* was a different category of miracles altogether, reserved for the saints, and thus to be distinguished from the *Muʿjizah*. This chapter will show that in the early period of Islam, the fact and nature of the *Muʿjizah* was not a foregone conclusion; as is the nature of theological discourse, the *Muʿjizah* matured in response to impulses from both *within* the Muslim community (through engagement with scripture and theological principles derived therefrom) and from without (through interfaith debates, primarily with Christian, but also, Jewish, theologians). By demonstrating how the *Muʿjizah* became centralized in Muslim prophetology, this chapter is engaged in a broader discussion of the place of miracles in early Islamic theology and prepares the ground for a more focused discussion on the emergence of *saintly* miracles in forthcoming chapters.

2.1 Prophetic Miracles in the Qur'ān

Muslim scholarship has seldom doubted the mere possibility of miracles. Taken at face value, the Qur'ān affirms miracles of various sorts, with many appearing in retellings of miraculous stories found in Jewish and Christian traditions, and some introduced by the Qur'ān. While some verses are ambiguous on the question of miracles (as we will see shortly), others are almost categorically unambiguous in depicting miracles where both the personalities relevant to the scene in question, and more importantly, the Qur'ān's intended audience, are to apprehend the extraordinariness of the incident and that it unquestionably results from divine intervention. Often, miracles appear in association with human prophets in order to confirm to the messenger himself

that he has been sent by God,[48] and to establish his stature with God to those around him—to prove "that he has been sent in order to point to the reality of God."[49] By way of example, as in the Bible, events surrounding Moses' staff are integral to this prophet's miraculous feats in the Qur'ān. When Moses finds himself competing with the Pharaoh's magicians in producing marvels, Moses' staff miraculously mutates into a snake and as the Qur'ān puts it, "gobbles up" those of the other magicians who upon seeing this, prostrate and proclaim belief in the "Lord of the worlds, the [very same] Lord of Moses and Aaron." Though the Pharaoh protests against their intransigence and declares that their rejecting him with such defiance, and in public no less, might cost them their lives, they show no regard for his threats and place their hopes in God instead (Q 26:43-51; 20:65-73; cf. to the Biblical telling, Exodus 7:8-12).[50] Also, when Moses pleads to God to relieve his people of drought, God instructs him to strike "the rock" with his staff and lo and behold, twelve springs gush forth (e.g., Q 2:60; cf. Exodus 17:5-7). Likewise, the Qur'ān states regarding Solomon that, "We [i.e., God] subjected the wind to his power, to

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[48] The predominant view among Islamic theologians, inclusive of those we will consult throughout, has been that prophets (as opposed to the *awliyā'*) were exclusively male. It is worth noting that all individuals *explicitly* identified as prophets (*nabī,* pl. *anbiyā*) or messengers (*rasūl*, pl. *rusul*) in the Qur'an are indeed men. As we will see, this will play a role in the justification of *karāmāt* via the miracles associated with supposed non-prophets in the Qur'ān, so it is appropriate that they be figured in the masculine in accordance with this tradition. That said, there was a handful of important theologians who held that women too, especially those who have pride of place in the Qur'an and are depicted as engaging in intimate discourse with the divine (most notably, Maryam and Āsiyah, wife of Moses) could be prophets. Stated baldly, the argument is that scripture is not explicit on prophethood being exclusive to one gender, and moreover, some women are presented as receiving "inspiration" from the Divine, which, they contended, is precisely the criterion for the status of "prophethood." Of those who held this view, the most famous among them are the Ẓahirite scholar, Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064), the Sunnī scholar, al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272), and the Sunnī-Sufī Muḥyi al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), all three of Andalusian fame. See Maribel Fierro, "Women as Prophets in Islam," in *Writing the Feminine: Women in Arab Sources*, eds. Manuela Marín and Randi Deguilhem (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 83-198.

[49] David Thomas, "Miracles in Islam," in *The Cambridge Companion to Miracles,* ed. Graham H. Twelftree (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 202.

[50] Also, as with the Bible (Exodus 17:5), God inspires Moses to strike the sea with his staff, whereupon the sea parts into two, "each part like a huge mountain" (Q 26:63), providing the Children of Israel with safe passage across. The seas then come back together to drown Pharaoh along with his army.

flow gently to his order, wheresoever he willed" (Q 38:36). Importantly, as in the examples here, miracles associated with prophets are routinely presented as occurring at God's command or after God's prompting the prophet in some way, not as resulting purely from the prophet's independent will. God, and never the prophets, is the source. They thus serve a very specific purpose. As Thomas explains, miracles come in the Qur'ān to

> evoke a response on the part of humans which consists primarily of acknowledging his existence and power, and then of recognizing the relationship they have with him. The fact that these actions or events are miraculous is intentionally to evoke this response and the belief expressed in appropriate conduct that issues from it. Thus, they are elements within God's overall will to give guidance to created humanity, and they function as the first step in arousing awareness of him.[51]

Like the prophets to whom they are granted, miracles in the Qur'ān are gateways from God, to God, *through* the prophets.

2.2 The Qur'ānic Stance against Miracles in Muḥammad's Mission

As is clear from the above, the Qur'ān assumes a certain level of familiarity with pre-Islamic miracle narratives from the Biblical tradition. Miracles are presented as part of a broader rhetorical strategy used in the Qur'ān: to depict Muḥammad as heir to a line of prophets that long predate him. An essential aspect of the Qur'ānic narrative is the presentation of Muḥammad not as a radical departure from prophetic history, but rather as ushering a *return* to the path of earlier prophets. The Qur'ān argues that time and again, God sent prophets to their respective communities, but, despite the clarity of their calls to God, their people would reject and/or transform their message into something wholly other. For example, like other prophets, Christ presented with revelation and

[51] David Thomas, "Miracles in Islam," 201.

"signs" (i.e., miracles) to prove himself a messenger and to call others to the worship of God alone.[52] However, in spite of Christ's call to monotheism, Christians are accused of falsely attributing to Christ a claim to divinity, and then, of inventing trinitarian theology out of whole cloth after him (e.g., Q 4:171; 5:73). Jesus himself is depicted, presumably on the day of judgment, to disavow having ever preached his own divinity (Q 5:116).[53] The Qur'ān therefore, assumes the failure of previous scriptural communities to uphold the messages of their prophets as a standard feature of human history, as reflected in the schematic fashion in which prophetic stories are depicted: prophet emerges amidst his people, calling to the worship of the one true God and claiming that he be followed as prophet of God → prophet is challenged with proving his claim to prophethood → God produces miracles for the prophet → his people stubbornly reject the prophet in spite of his miracles. Often, but not always, rejection of the prophet is followed by punishment from God in this world (in anticipation of eternal damnation to come in the next).[54] Thus, among the primary functions of miracles in the Qur'ān is to present humans as tending to reject truth, even in the face of compelling evidence for it, such as in the form of miracles.

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[52] Among these signs is that of the "Banquet;" upon the request of his disciples, Christ prays to God, "Our Lord, send us from heaven a table spread with food as a feast for us…and as a *sign* from You." To this, God responds, "I will send it down to you. But whoever among you denies afterwards will be subjected to a torment I have never inflicted on anyone of My creatures" (Q 5:112-115); elsewhere, Christ speaks of other signs of his, stating, "I come unto you with a *sign* from your Lord. Indeed, I fashion for you out of clay the likeness of a bird, and I breathe into it, and it is a bird, *by God's leave*. I heal the blind and the leper, and I raise the dead, [all] *by God's leave*…" (Q 3:49).

[53] For an accessible discussion on how Jesus figures in the Qur'ān, see Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1965; 1999). For Muslim perceptions of Jesus beyond the Qur'an, see Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Todd Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur'an: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009); and Gabriel Said Reynolds, "The Islamic Christ," in *The Oxford Handbook of Christology*, ed. Francesca Aran Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 185-198.

[54] One *sura* (Qur'anic "chapter") which brings together narratives of various prophets, each having a similar experience in the fashion above, one after the other, is *sūrat al-shuʿarā'* (The Poets) (Q 26).

On the one hand, narratives of pre-Muḥammadan miracles serve as part of a warning for Muḥammad's audience that his community does not repeat the same mistake of rejecting their own prophet. On the other hand, the narratives arguably set up an important aspect of Muḥammad's mission as figured in the Qur'ān, serving as the foreground for the Qur'ānic defense *against* centering miracles in the Muḥammadan mission. Where most pre-Muḥammadan prophets present with miracles, the Qur'ān is consistent in rebuffing constant demands from Muḥammad's opponents for the same. Instead, the Qur'ān appeals to its audience that they reflect on and marvel at the regularity and order found in nature itself, in order "to emphasize that the universe and all that is in it could not have brought themselves into existence," [55] and that their existence must return to the one, true God. Just as supramundane miracles are supposed to point onlookers to God, so too, the Qur'ān argues, should we find wonder and divine creativity in the mundane. Thus, it could be said that for Muḥammad, "everything was a miracle; he did not distinguish between ordinary and extraordinary or supernatural. He did not recognise any law in nature, in which case only something that broke those laws would have been a 'sign' for him."[56] In this connection, the Qur'ān presents the land and sea,[57] the human mind itself,[58] and essentially all naturally occurring phenomena, as signs to God for those who simply reflect on these wonders. The following excerpt (3:190-191) is prototypical of this recurring Qur'ānic theme:

> Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the day and night are signs for people of reason—Those who remember God while

[55] Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'ān* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 52.
[56] Josef van Ess, *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Century of the Hijra: A History of Religious Thought in Early Islam*, *Volume 4*, trans. Gwendolin Goldbloom (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 711.
[57] See Q 27:63, on the human ability to navigate "the darkness of land and sea" as among the signs of God; cf. Q 16:16 on the role of the stars in navigation.
[58] "We shall show them Our signs in the horizons *and within themselves*, so that it be clear to them that it/He (ambiguous; likely the former, i.e., the Qur'ān) is the Truth/True," Q 41:53.

> standing, while sitting, and while reclining on their sides [i.e., at all times], and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth, [and say]: "Our Lord! You have not created [all of] this without purpose. Glory be to You! Protect us from the torment of the Fire!"

Thereby, such verses posit the acknowledgement of God and seeking refuge in God as a natural consequence of pondering on the world that surrounds us. As Fazlur Rahman explains, this argument rests "on the assumption, or rather seeks to prove, that the same God who created nature and displayed His wisdom therein so clearly has also revealed the verses…of the Qur'ān."[59] However, such appeals do not satisfy Muḥammad's opponents, who are presented as stubborn in their demand for *supernatural* miracles. They mock the idea that one who "eats food and walks in the markets" (Q 25:7), i.e., all too unremarkable in his sheer commonness, all too human, should have the honor of being a prophet sent by God; they demand that an angel be sent down in plain view to confirm Muḥammad's claims (Q 6:8); they proclaim, for example, "we shall never believe in you unless you cause a spring to gush forth for us from the earth" (Q 17:90), surely an echo of Moses' spontaneously emerging springs; indeed, a prophet, they argue, should be able to produce wealth, the likes of "a garden of palms and vines"(Q 17:91), on command.

To the claim that an angelic being, and not a human, would be a worthier messenger, the Qur'ān retorts, who better to send to humans than their like to act as a model? For, "had there been angels (living) on earth…We would have certainly sent down an angel from the heavens as a messenger" (Q 17:95). Besides, the Qur'ān displays a certain frustration on the part of God at the historical human tendency to reject prophets in spite of the presence of supernatural miracles. This, in light of the Qur'ān rehearsing

[59] Rahman, *Major Themes*, 49.

multiple such stories from the past; these stories are intended to prove that miracles are largely ineffective in drawing people to God. Given the unpromising track record in prophetic history, the Qur'ān argues that miracles would not avail Muḥammad: "Even if We had sent down unto you (O Prophet) a Message written on paper so that they could touch it with their hands, the disbelievers would have said: 'This is nothing but obvious magic'" (Q 6:7; cf. 3:183ff). In another verse, we read, "And nothing has prevented Us from sending signs [i.e., miracles] except that earlier peoples disbelieved them" (17:59).[60] Furthermore, the Qur'ān reflects, and responds to, a certain uneasiness on Muḥammad's part for his inability to satisfy this demand for miracles. In addressing the Prophet, Q 6:33-35 reads:

> We know well that what they say grieves you. It is not you that they deny, but it is the verses (*āyāt*) of God that the wrongdoers deny. Indeed, messengers before you were rejected, but patiently, they endured rejection and persecution until Our succor came to them…[.] *If you find their denial unbearable, then build—if you can—a tunnel through the earth or stairs to the sky to bring them a sign.* And if God willed, He could have guided them all. *So, do not be among the ignorant* (emphasis added).

These verses combine both consolation and unmistakable reproach;[61] here, God acknowledges that the Prophet is distressed by the inability to produce miracles on demand, but also counsels Muḥammad against such concerns, as though to succumb to their ultimatum—either you produce a miracle or admit you are false—would prove him to be "among the ignorant." As Gril observes concerning this verse, "the Prophet is not even permitted to wish for a miraculous sign, neither from below nor above."[62] In

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[60] For more on this Qur'ānic argument, see Denis Gril, "Les fondements scripturaires du miracle en islam," *Miracle et Karāma: Hagiographies médiévales comparées*, ed. Denise Aigle (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2000), 243-244.
[61] See Rahman, *Major Themes,* 53; also, Grils, "Les Fondements scripturaires," 244.
[62] Gril, "Les fondements scripturaires du miracle," 244, my translation.

response, the Prophet is instructed, "Say, I have no power to benefit or protect myself except as God wills. If I had known the unknown, I would have benefited myself enormously, and no harm would have ever touched me. *I am only a warner and a bearer of glad tidings to those who believe*" (Q 7:188, emphasis added; cf. Q 2:119). For the Qur'ān, the Prophet's primary task then, is to convey and model revelation from God.

These rhetorical moves concerning miracles (or rather, the absence thereof) for Muḥammad culminate in the Qur'ānic stance that it is not supernatural miracles, but rather, the revelation itself which Muḥammad bears, the Qur'ān, that corroborates his mission.[63] That is, as opposed to extraordinary events which break the laws of nature, the Qur'ān itself is adduced as the ultimate proof of Muḥammad's prophecy. Indeed, the very same word used for miracles (*ayāt*) are used in the Qur'ān for its verses; the verses of the Qur'ān are presented as "clear signs" (e.g., Q 2:99), with words also used to denote the supernatural portents provided to earlier prophets (e.g., the "nine clear signs (*ayāt*)" granted Moses, Q 17:101). Likewise, the Qur'ān speaks of incontrovertibly "clear" (*bayyinah*) signs provided to earlier prophets (e.g. 6:57, 8:42, 11:17), and then, also refers to itself as a *bayyinah* (e.g., Q 98:1).[64] The Qur'ān is presented as inimitable in its nature and content, and challenges its opponents to "produce a *sūra* (portion) of similar merit" if indeed their claims of Muḥammad being a false prophet are true (Q 2:23; cf. 10:38, 17:88, 52:34ff).[65] The inimitability of the Qur'ān then, is presented as "the central proof

[63] Though I advance the view that the Qur'ān does not center extraordinary miracles in Muḥammad's claim to prophethood, there is some debate on this question. For example, the Qur'ān, at least on the surface, alludes to the direct intervention of angels to aid the Prophet and his followers against their polytheist opponents in the famous Battle of Badr (Q 8:12; 3:123-5), and this is but one of other examples often wielded in defense of miracles for the Prophet. I discuss others below.
[64] On the various terms used in the Qur'an to present itself as rationally compelling, see Rahman, *Major Themes*, 50-52.
[65] Rahman, *Major Themes*, 49

granted to Muḥammad in authentication of his prophetic status."[66] Thus, in his study on Muḥammad, Rubin writes that when one approaches the Qur'ān "without benefit of post-Qur'ānic interpretation, Muḥammad emerges as a mortal prophet who still has no miracle other than the Qur'ān, the book he received from God."[67]

2.3 Establishing the Wonder-Working Muḥammad

2.3.1 The Splitting of the Moon

While the Qur'ān seems to present Muḥammad as wanting for miracles, in time the Islamic tradition came to discover that he too, like earlier prophets, displayed a plethora of miracles, some of which is attested to by revelation. In this section, I present the most formidable of alleged Qur'ānic references to the Prophet's miracles. We will see that most of such allusions are either ambiguous (thus requiring extra-Qur'ānic material to fill in the details to present a clearer picture of a miraculous incident), or instead, reflect events that are better characterized as something other than miraculous.

Among these are a set of verses said to refer to the famous incident of the Splitting of the Moon. In Q 54:1-2 we read, "the moon has split in two, and the hour has drawn near." In his work on Muslim reception history of Muḥammad, Rubin argues convincingly that this verse is a reference to a historical lunar eclipse which the Qur'ān then presented as a sign of the power of God, He who created the world and controls it, including its celestial bodies.[68] As aforementioned, the Qur'ān repeatedly refers to natural

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[66] Sophia Vasalou, "The Miraculous Eloquence of the Qur'an: General Trajectories and Individual Approaches," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 4, no. 2 (2010): 23.
[67] Uri Rubin, "Muḥammad's Message in Mecca: Warnings, Signs, and Miracles," in *The Cambridge Companion to Muḥammad*, ed. Jonathan E. Brockopp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 39.
[68] Rubin, "Muḥammad's Message in Mecca," 44. This view is solidly established in the exegetical tradition. For classical works which confirm this was adopted by some exegetes, see for example, Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān ʿan Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*, eds. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir

phenomena, both celestial and terrestrial, as signs of God and reminders of the impending day of judgment, thus Q 16:10-16 refers to the heavens, the sun, the moon, the stars, the sea with its ships, the diversity in fruits and vegetation, all as signs for "those who can understand." Within this context and absent extra-Qur'ānic material, it is difficult to read the Qur'ānic "splitting of the moon" as anything but one of many cosmological phenomena which the Qur'ān presents as eschatological signs, or signs of Divine power. Yet, the splitting of the moon soon becomes a reference to a divine miracle that manifests specifically for the Prophet, in order to convince his skeptical people of the truth of his message. As tradition would have it, at one point when a group of Arab polytheists demand a miracle from the Prophet, Muḥammad points to the moon, whereupon it splits into two halves between which Mount Hira (in Mecca) can be seen; thereafter, the two halves are joined once again.[69] However, prior to the completion of the third/ninth century, Muslims were divided in their understanding of this verse. Some denied it altogether as a reference to a historic event due to epistemic considerations about "the impossibility of suppressing reports of significant events in the absence of sufficient motivation to do so."[70] Given the extraordinary nature of an event as described in the traditions, one would expect an abundance of reports attesting to it, including from non-Muslim sources. As such reports do not exist (for only Muslims, and at that, a handful of witnesses, have reported the incident), the event could not have taken place, or so a few

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and Aḥmad Shākir (Mecca: Dār al-Tarbiyah wa al-Turāth, 2000), 22:565-570; and, Abū al-Qāsim al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), *al-Kashshāf ʿan Ḥaqā'iq Ghawāmiṣ al-Tanzīl* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1987), 4:430-431.

[69] For more on how this myth functioned in Islamic spirituality, see Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad is his Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1985), 69-74.

[70] Hussein Abdulsater, "Full Texts, Split Moons, Eclipsed Narratives: The Literary History of a Cosmological Miracle," *Narrative Culture* 5, no. 2 (2018): 162-164.

Muslim skeptics proclaimed.[71] Consequently, this camp argued that the verse is a reference to an apocalyptic event to come in the end of days.[72]

The debate notwithstanding, the overwhelming consensus in the exegetical tradition seems to have been that this verse refers to a historical splitting of the moon that occurred during Muḥammad's lifetime. The scholars generally corroborate this position by reference to *ḥadīth* on the event.[73] Still, the *ḥadīth* corpus, which does assume a historical event in the Prophet's time, reflects two differing perspectives from early Islam: that the incident was miraculous, and that it was not. In a tradition with a likely *terminus post quem* of the end of the first/seventh century, ʿIkrimah, a companion of the Prophet, reports that "the moon was eclipsed during the lifetime of the Messenger of God…[whereupon] the Prophet said [quoting the Qur'ān]: 'The Hour has drawn nigh, and the moon is split.'"[74] This report is typical of other "simple reports" that can be

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[71] One important early skeptic was the renowned Muʿtazilite forebear, Abū Isḥāq Ibrahīm al-Naẓẓām (d. ca. 230/845); the Sunnī traditionist Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276/889) recounts (disapprovingly) that al-Naẓẓām went as far accusing Ibn Masʿūd, one Companion who allegedly witnessed the event and went on to narrate it, as having outright falsified the incident. See ʿAbdullah Ibn Muslim Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Aṣfar (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1999), 70. Al-Naẓẓām's critique is also registered in ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Ḥamdānī, *Tathbīt Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah* (Cairo, Egypt: Dār al-Muṣṭafā, n.d.), 1:55-56. Other attestations to this position in early Islamic thought include Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944), *Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunnah*, ed. Majdī Bāslūm (Beirut: Al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2005), 9:441; and al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 4:431. Al-Māturīdī associates this view with the early Muʿtaziite, Abū Bakr al-Aṣamm (d. 200/816). Al-Zamakhsharī, himself a Muʿtazilīte, associates this view more loosely with "some" from the exegetes. Importantly, all three sources (the Muʿtazalite al-Zamakhsharī included) mention this dissenting view only to then refute one way or another.

[72] Hussein Abdulsater, "Full Texts," 162-164; cf. S.O.A.S. resident Qur'anist, Abdul Haleem, in his translation and gloss of the Qur'an, while noting other interpretations, argues that the verse "clearly refers to the end of the world." See M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an: A New Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 350. However, while using past tense for the future is a common feature in classical Arabic (which occurs unambiguously in various instances, e.g., Q 55:37), that this is the case here is admittedly debatable. Indeed, that the plain meaning of the text, given that it uses the past tense, is commonly adduced as evidence of a miraculous event in the Prophet's time. Thus, our Muʿtazilī scholar, ʿAbd al-Jabbār, writes: if indeed al-Naẓẓām were correct, then the text would have read, "...and the moon *will* split." *Tathbīt Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah*, 1:56-57.

[73] For a collection of such reports, see al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, 22:565-570.

[74] ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, ed. Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-Aʿẓamī (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 1989), 3:104, adapted from the translation in Abdulsater, "Full Texts," 170. In dating this tradition, Abdulsater follows the methodology established by Harald Motzki. See Motzki, "The *Muṣannaf* of ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-

securely established as circulating by the end of the 7th century, and arguably serve to rebut metaphorical or eschatological interpretations of the text.[75] In this report, the Qur'ānic verse is revealed in response to a cosmological phenomenon that simply occurred during the Prophet's lifetime; as with other natural phenomena, God, via the Prophet, merely prompts reflection on what would otherwise have been an incidental, perhaps fear-inducing event, as one of God's signs of the Hour to come. In more complex "composite reports" however, such as the aforementioned report where the moon is halved on both sides of Mount Hira, we see the Qur'ānic text interpreted beyond its plain meaning, transforming the splitting of the moon to an extraordinary event which manifested specifically to confirm Muḥammad's prophethood. Whether the nonmiraculous reading predates its miraculous counterpart cannot be established with certainty.[76] What is clear however is that the traditions taken together, reflect a diversity of interpretations for Q 54:1-2 from the early period, and it is only later on, beginning in the third/ninth century, that the miraculous reading becomes clearly dominant.[77] More to the point, the miraculous nature of "the splitting of the moon," was not a given for all Muslims, including those within traditionist circles. Next follows a discussion on two

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Ṣanʿānī as a Source of Authentic *Aḥādīth* of the First Century A.H.," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 50 (1991): 1-21.

[75] Abdulsater, "Full Texts," 156. I follow Abdulsater's distinction between "simple reports" and "composite reports," the latter which elaborate on the former and often result from the combination of various simple ones.

[76] Abdulsater bases his findings on the literary history of these traditions on the assumption that the two readings merely reflect "evidence of parallel interpretations." See Abdulsater, "Full Texts," 157. There is also the complementary position that where simple reports exist alongside more detailed reports, it is likely that the former predate the latter, such that complex reports reflect latter-day accretions or reinterpretations of earlier accounts. Where one stands on this is inconsequential to the purpose of our discussion here, which is to show that by the end of the 1st/7th century, Muslims who assumed the historicity of the Moon Split were already divided on the question of its miraculous nature.

[77] Abdulsater, "Full Texts," 171.

other Muḥammadan miracles which are conceived as originating in the Qur'ān: that of the Night Journey (*al-isrā*) and the Ascent (*miʿrāj*).

2.3.2 The Night Journey and Ascent to Heaven (al-Isrā' wa al-Miʿrāj)

The Night Journey (*isrā'*) from Mecca to Jerusalem, and then, the Ascent to the Heavens (*miʿrāj*), are typically paired as occurring on the same night, the second subsequent to the first, and are perhaps the most famous of miracles associated with the Prophet, having inspired much pious and spiritual reflection in prose and poetry.[78] For most Qur'ānic exegetes in the tradition, the Qur'ān alludes to the Night Journey in the following: "Blessed is He who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Furthest Mosque, whose precincts We blessed, to show him some of Our signs. He is the Hearing, the Seeing" (Q 17:1). This verse, as Buckley states, is "the most crucial and indisputable proof of the *isrā'*" in the exegetical literature.[79] Also associated with this night is Q 17:60, which reads, "And [remember, O Prophet], when We told you,

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[78] There is a wealth of scholarship on the *isrā' wa al-miʿrāj*; for studies of the two together, see R.P. Buckley, *The Night Journey and Ascension in Islam: The Receptions of Religious Narrative in Sunnī, Shiʿī and Western Culture* (London: IB Tauris, 2013); Steven J. McMichael, "The Night Journey (al-isrāʾ) and Ascent (al-miʿrāj) of Muhammad in Medieval Muslim and Christian Perspectives," *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 22, no. 3 (2011): 293-309. For the Journey to Jerusalem in particular, see Angelika Neuwirth, "From the Sacred Mosque to the Remote Temple," in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, eds. Jane D. McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish, and Joseph W. Goering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 376-407. On the Ascent, see Brooke Olson Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys, Earthly Concerns: The Legacy of the* Miʿrāj *in the Formation of Islam* (London: Routledge, 2005); and the collected essays in *The Prophet's Ascension: Cross-cultural Encounters with the Islamic Mi'rāj Tales*, eds. Christiane Gruber and Frederick Colby (Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 2010). For a study on a culture-specific legacy of the legend, see Christiane Gruber, *The Ilkhanid Book of Ascension: a Persian-Sunni Devotional Tale* (London: IB Tauris, 2010).

[79] Buckley, *The Night Journey and Ascension,* 20. The verse is already associated with the *miʿrāj* in the Qur'ānic exegesis (*tafsīr*) of Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/767), which remains the earliest extant commentary available to us, notwithstanding debates on the authenticity of the text. See Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān, *Kitāb Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh Maḥmūd Shaḥātah (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā al-Turāth, 1423[/2002]), 2:513. On the significance of Muqātil's commentary, see Kees Versteegh, *Arabic Grammar and Qur'ānic Exegesis in Early Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 130-159. There was in fact some debate as to whether the Prophet was at the Sacred Mosque when he began this journey or whether he was instead, at his cousin, Umm Hānī's place (in Mecca), with whom he was visiting on that night. No matter the case, both readings place him in Mecca so that the journey occurred from the sacred land of Mecca to the Temple in Jerusalem. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, 17:330-334.

'Certainly your Lord encompasses the people [with His knowledge and might]: and so *We have not made what we showed you except but a test for the people*…We convey a warning to them, but this only increases them greatly in defiance."[80] Among the supplementary information one finds in such material is that on that night, the Prophet was carried on a mythical animal called al-Burāq, resembling "something between a donkey and a she-mule,"[81] from the Sacred Mosque in Mecca to the sacred precincts in Jerusalem. The wonders of the event include that this journey occurred in a *single* night when such a journey, al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) tells us, would normally take 40 nights.[82] There, at the Temple of Jerusalem,[83] the accounts report, Muḥammad finds Abraham, Moses, and Jesus along with other prophets, and leads them in prayer as their *imām* (leader). In the subsequent *miʿrāj*, Muḥammad ascends through the heavens, again meeting various earlier prophets in each heavenly sphere, as he passes by scenes pregnant

[80] In his commentary, Muqātil explains that the verse speaks to "the Night Journey [*al-isrā'*] on the night where he [i.e., Muḥammad] was taken by night to Jerusalem." Muqātil, *Tafsīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān*, 2:513. So too the commentary associated with Mujāhid Ibn Jabr al-Makhzūmī (d. 104/722), which in realty, is a later compilation of traditions attributed to Mujāhid. See Abī Abū al-Hajjāj Mujāhid Ibn Jabr, *Tafsīr Mujāhid*, ed. Muhammad ʿAbd al-Salām Abū al-Nīl (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr, 1410/1989), 138. On Mujāhid, see Andrew Rippin, "Mudjāhid b. Djabr al-Makkī," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 7:293.

[81] Muḥammad Ibn Saʿd [d. 230/845], *al-Tabaqāt al-Kubrā*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā' (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1990), 1:116.

[82] Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn ʿUmar Al-Rāzī [d. 606/1210], *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā al-Turāth), 20:292.

[83] Neuwirth, "From the Sacred Mosque to the Remote Temple," 386; some scholars have questioned the attribution of the Qur'ānic "*al-masjid al-aqṣā*" ("the furthest mosque") to Jerusalem; in sum, these scholars argue that the exegetical tradition is mostly responsible for this association, which owes to the increasing importance of Jerusalem in Muslim polemics and self-identity during the Umayyad period and after. They argue that that the Qur'ān originally refers not to an earthly destination, but rather to a heavenly one, the "furthest" (*al-aqṣā*) "place of prostration" (which is the etymological import of the term, *masjid*, undergirding the technical meaning which the word acquires, a "mosque"). For a summary of the scholarship which doubts the traditional reading, see Uri Rubin, "Muḥammad's Night Journey (Isrā') to al-Masjid al-Aqṣā: Aspects of the Earliest Origins of the Islamic Sanctity of Jerusalem," *Al-Qanṭara* 29 (2008): 147-164. Rubin defends the traditional view.

with symbolism.[84] He continues to traverse the celestial waystations one after the other, until he passes "the seventh heaven,"[85] where he reaches the furthest point capable for humans, the liminal boundary between creation and Divinity, and there, was "two-bows length, or [even] nearer" to God.[86] For many commentators, the *miʿrāj* is implied in Q 53:14-18, which reads,

> And, indeed, he saw him a second time,
> *By the lote-tree of the boundary*
> *Near unto the Garden of Promise,*
> *With the lote-tree veiled in a veil of nameless splendour…*
> The eye did not waver, nor yet did it stray:
> Truly did he see some of the most profound of his Sustainer's signs.[87]

Here, the Qur'ānic "farthest limit" (*al-muntahā*, "the boundary" in Asad's rendering), the "Garden of Promise," and the "veil" have been read as references to Muḥammad having traversed to the furthest point possible for humans, beyond which there is only "God."[88]

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[84] An early summary of the symbolism associated with the incident appears in the commentary of Muqātil (d. 150/767): "The Prophet was presented three river: one of milk, one of honey, one of wine, and he refused to drink the wine. [The angel] Gabriel then said, "Indeed, God has forbidden it [wine] for your nation." Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr Muqātil*, 2:513-514.

[85] Common in the exegetical literature, though not mentioned in associated Qur'ānic verses. See for example, Muqātil, *Tafsīr Muqātil*, 4:160; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, 22:515. The language of seven heavenly layers is however solidly rooted in the Qur'ān (e.g., 2:29, 23:86).

[86] The phrase "Two-bows length or nearer" is Qur'ānic (53:9); the exegetical tradition is divided on the intended import of this verse. What follows are the three competing dominant readings of the proximity intended: 1.) Muḥammad's proximity to the angel Gabriel; 2.) Gabriel's proximity to the Divine; 3.) Muḥammad's proximity to God. For example, Mujāhid's commentary reflects the second, while for Muqātil, it is the third. See Mujāhid, *Tafsīr Mujāhid*, 525; Muqātil, *Tafsīr Muqātil*, 4:160. For a summary of the discussion and authorities associated with each position, see al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, 22:502-505. Al-Tabarī prefers the first position.

[87] Adapted with minor adjustments from Muhammad Asad, *The Message of The Qur'ān* (Bristol, England: The Book Foundation, 2003), 926; hereafter, all citations to Asad refer to the Bristol Foundation edition. On the association of these verses with the Ascent, see Josef van Ess, "Vision and Ascension; *Sūrat al-Najm* and its Relationship with Muḥammad's *miʿrāj*," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 1, no. 1 (1999): 47-62. See also Tarif Khalidi, *Images of Muhammad: Narratives of the Prophet in Islam Across the Centuries* (New York, Doubleday, 2009), 85; and Neuwirth, "From the Sacred Mosque to the Remote Temple," 386-387.

[88] The thorny issue of whether this implies location for the Divine, who as such lies "beyond" this furthest point, is outside the scope of our interests. For reflections on this question, see Hannah Bigelow Merriman, "The Paradox of Proximity to the Infinite: An Exploration of sidrat al-muntaha, 'the Lote Tree beyond Which None May Pass," *Religion and the Arts* 12, no. 1 (2008): 329-342.

Assuming the Qur'ān affirms a Night Journey and Heavenly Ascent as experiences of the Prophet, it is worth noting that both the Qur'ān and some of the traditions present the journeys as *private* experiences. Though the public is later informed of these events to test whether they would accept Muḥammad's testimony, the incidents themselves are not for public viewing. The Qur'ān relays the experiences to attest to some of the special favors God grants His prophet, as well as to impress upon the believer to accept Muḥammad's accounts of those experiences. From this perspective, the Journey and Ascent are altogether separate from the public miracles of other prophets depicted in the Qur'ān; in the latter, it is direct witnessing of miracles that makes the case for the prophet in question. While for the earlier prophets, accepting their status and the revelation they bear is predicated on the miracles they manifest, the case is the opposite for Muḥammad: In the Qur'ān, accepting the Night Journey and the Ascent is predicated on accepting Muḥammad as Prophet.[89]

The earliest discussions on both journeys reflect debate on whether these experiences happened in real time—in a wakeful state—or whether they were visions instead. In the accounts presented in Ibn Isḥāq's (d. 151/768) biography (*sīrah*) of the Prophet, an important source of the Sunnī biographical tradition, Ibn Isḥāq writes that the night journey was "certainly an act of God by which He took him [Muḥammad] by night in whichever way He pleased."[90] This, as Guillaume notes in the commentary to his

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[89] An observation also made by Gril, "Les fondements scripturaires du miracle en islam," 247; on traditions which present the incidents as a source of humiliation for the Prophet, and then on how other narratives present the vindication of Muhammad's testimony and evidence for the journey, see Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys, Earthly Concerns*, 82-95.

[90] Abd al-Mālik Ibn Hishām, *Sīrat Ibn Hishām*, eds. Muṣṭafā al-Saqā et al. (Egypt: Sharikat Maktabat wa Maṭbaʿat Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa Awlādihi, 1955), 1:397; cf. Alfred Guillaume (trans.), *The Life of Muhammad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 182, henceforth as Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*.

translation, is a clever way of acknowledging the debate, and leaves open "the question whether it was an actual physical journey or a nocturnal vision."[91] Indeed, Ibn Isḥāq can be read as having a preference for the journey as a vision.[92] At the very least, Ibn Isḥāq's presentation reveals that Muslims debated whether a visionary experience was less wondrous, and potentially less befitting for a Prophet. Alongside other accounts, Ibn Isḥāq records four different narrations that present the journey as a vision, among them, one attributed to Muḥammad's wife, 'Ā'ishah, who states, "the Apostle's body did not depart on that night, but instead, God took his spirit by night."[93] He then seeks to reconcile both views by positing that whether the incident occurred in a wakeful or dream state is ultimately immaterial, for in the case of prophets, their experiences are in both cases, "true."[94]

Regardless of whether one is convinced by his reconciliation, Ibn Isḥāq is clearly trying to toe the line on an issue that divided the earliest Muslim chroniclers,[95] and where he errs on this (to state that for a prophet, a spiritual experience is no less "true" than a bodily one), highly suggests an inclination towards the non-literal view. Clearly, those who viewed the experience as spiritual were not insignificant in number, thus suggesting that even for these most famous of miracles, their supernatural nature was not squarely guaranteed. Ultimately, in this case, a spiritual experience would be much less wondrous than a bodily experience; most all of us have traveled to all sorts of places in dreams, and many associate such travels with the spirit. Bodily travel from Mecca to Jerusalem in a

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[91] Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 182
[92] See Colby, *Narrating Muhammad's Night Journey,* 251
[93] Ibn Hishām, *Sīrat Ibn Isḥāq,* 1:399; cf. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 183.
[94] Ibn Hishām, *Sīrat Ibn Hishām*, 1:400; cf. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 183
[95] This existence of this debate is also well-established in the exegetical tradition; see al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, 17:335ff.

single night is much more taxing on the intellect than is the notion of a spiritual journey; naturally, those who admit the existence of a subtle body called "spirit" do not take it as bound by material constraints, as opposed to the physical body (at least in normal experience). Therein lies the appeal of the journey as physical for those who seek to present a wonder-working prophet in Muḥammad.[96]

2.4 Miracles and the Genre of *Ithbāt al-Nubuwwah* ("Establishing Prophecy")

As Muslims, Christians, and Jews debated Muḥammad's prophethood, there arose an inter-faith project of refining the criteria for establishing claims of prophecy, thus the development of the *ithbāt/tathbīt al-nubuwwah* ("establishment of prophecy") genre. Beginning in the third/ninth century, including a set of criteria for prophecy became standard in comprehensive treatments of *kalām*, where scholars systematically elaborated on the *dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, that is, "the proofs of Prophethood."[97] As Stroumsa

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[96] Another curious aspect in the formation of the *isrā' wa al-miʿrāj* narrative is that the two incidents were not always coupled. Consider for example, the report where Umm Hāni' (female Companion and cousin to the Prophet) reports that the Prophet said to her regarding the Night Journey, "I prayed with you the last evening prayer in this valley as you saw. Then I went to the Sacred Temple [in Jerusalem] and prayed there. Then I have just prayed the morning prayer with you as you see," then he stood to leave her presence (Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, 1:402). The account suggests that this is what the Prophet had to tell Umm Hāni' of his experience. It seems odd that this account would leave out an ascent into the heavens that occurred between the journey to Jerusalem and the Prophet's joining her and others in communal prayers the next morning. Indeed, Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/845) presents self-contained accounts on the Ascent, followed by accounts on the Night Journey, and cites traditions that provide different dates for both; see Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1:166-1:1668. Likewise, Ibn Isḥāq in his various accounts, though he does present one tradition which has the Prophet bringing the two together; see Ibn Hishām, 1:403. Cf. Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muhammad As Viewed by the Early Muslims-A Textual Analysis* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1995), 65-66.

[97] Kister lists fifteen different works produced over the course of the 3rd-5th/9th-11th centuries, beginning with Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr ibn Baḥr al-Jāhiẓ (d. 256/870), and ending with Abu Bakr Aḥmad al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066), all dedicated to compiling proofs and miracles of Muhammad's prophethood, although using varying terminology to indicate "proofs" (*dala'il, aʿlām, amārāt*). Indeed, such discussions of the Prophet's miracles retain their importance throughout Islamic history, with the most popular being *al-Shifā' fī Taʿrīf Ḥuqūq al-Musṭafā* by Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ al-Yaḥṣubī (d. 544/1149). See M.J. Kister, "The Sirah Literature," in *Arabic Literature to the end of the Umayyad Period*, eds. A. F. L. Beeston, T. M. Johnstone, R. B. Serjeant, and G. R. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 355-356. See also, Sarah Stroumsa, "The signs of Prophecy: The Emergence and Early Development of a Theme in Arabic Theological Literature," *The Harvard Theological Review* 78, no. 1/2 (1985): 101. For more on the place of miracles in Muslim perceptions of Muḥammad more generally, see the chapter on "Legends and Miracles" in Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad was His Messenger*, 67-80.

explains, "since Muḥammad had claimed to be a prophet, and since this claim had been rejected by both Jews and Christians, the traits that distinguish a true prophet from a false one at once became a key issue."[98] Such treatments routinely sought to establish the need humans have for prophets, and more importantly for our purposes, to defend a particular claim of superiority for one figure over another (e.g., for Christ on the Christian side, and for Muslims, Muḥammad).

2.4.1 The Qur'ān as Miracle Per Excellence

The *ithbāt al-nubuwwah* literature, with its arguments "shaped and reshaped in the course of the interreligious debate,"[99] was instrumental in the development of Muslim prophetology. Among the earliest *ithbāt* works was the *Ḥujaj al-Nubuwwah* (Proofs of Prophecy) of Abū ʿUthmān al-Jāḥiẓ (160-255/776-868),[100] in which he speaks of two categories of proofs: those arising from sense experience (*ʿiyān ẓāhir*) and those based on undeniable tradition (*khabar qāhir*).[101] The first primarily refers to prophetic miracles witnessed (i.e., via "sense experience") by the Prophet's contemporaries. The second, a reference to knowledge acquired via transmission, indicates first revelation, and second, prophetic miracles reliably transmitted. With his reflections on revelation, al-Jāhiẓ is among the first to anticipate what would become central to doctrine on Muḥammad's prophethood, the Qur'ān's *iʿjāz* (inimitability), which al-Jāhiẓ centers in his typology of prophethood. As discussed above, the Qur'ān repeatedly challenges its audience to present something of its like, arguing that their failure to do so proves its divine origin.

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[98] Stroumsa, "The Signs of Prophecy," 105.
[99] Stroumsa, "The Signs of Prophecy," 106.
[100] The text has been published within a collection of treatises (*rasā'il*) penned by al-Jāḥiẓ; Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr Ibn Baḥr al-Jāhīẓ, *Ḥujaj al-Nubuwwah*, in *al-Rasā'il li-l-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1964), 3:223-281.
[101] Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Ḥujaj,* 3:225-226; cf. Stroumsa, "The Signs of Prophecy," 106.

Islamic theology would go on to elaborate on the exact nature of this inimitability; as with the Muslim conceptualization of prophetic, apologetic miracles, although originating in the Qur'ān, Muslim encounter with Christians and Jews incentivized the further development of *iʿjāz*.[102] As al-Jāhiẓ explains, in the distant past, long antedating Prophet Muḥammad, God had the habit of sending with each prophet miraculous confirmations which suited his people, in accordance with the arts they had best cultivated. Thus, Moses worked magic that bested that of the expert magicians at the Pharoah's court, and later, Jesus healed the sick, thereby outperforming the false healers of his day, and so on with the remaining prophets.[103] For al-Jāḥiẓ, who is among the first to systematically treat this doctrine, the Arabs, by Muḥammad's time, had developed an unparalleled linguistic sophistication so that something of unassailable linguistic prowess was the most suitable proof of prophethood for that context; thus, the unmatched rhetorical beauty of the Qur'ān was in and of itself the surest determinant of Muḥammad's prophethood.[104] Soon, a school of Muʿtazilites based in Basra, Iraq, would go on to refine the doctrine of the Qur'ān's inimitability (*iʿjāz al-qur'ān*), which was then adopted in the main by other Muʿtazlites and Muslim thinkers at large.[105]

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[102] Stroumsa, "The Signs of Prophecy," 107. On this, Richard C. Martin writes, "the more interesting issues involved the Muʿtazilites (and *eventually* the Ashʿarites) with other opponents inside and outside the pale of Islam;" Richard C. Martin, "The Role of the Basrah Muʿtazilah in Formulating the Doctrine of the Apologetic Miracle," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 49, no. 3 (1980): 175, emphasis added.
[103] Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Ḥujaj*, 3:278-279.
[104] Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Ḥujaj*, 3:279.
[105] Martin, "The Role of the Basrah Muʿtazilah," 176. Martin also presents internal discussions regarding the nature of the Qur'an's *iʿjāz*; some focused on linguistics, while others focused on the contents of the Qur'an. There was also the view that the Qur'ān was not, by its very nature, inimitable, but rather, that God had intervened to prevent (*ṣarfah*) the Prophet's contemporaries from producing its like. This view was predominantly associated with the Muʿtazilah. See Richard C. Martin and Mark R. Woodward, *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Muʿtazilitism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1997), 78-81. For discussions on the theory of *iʿjāz*, see Richard C. Martin, "Inimitability," *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 2:526-536. For analyses of particular treatments, see Eva-Maria Lika, *Proofs of Prophecy and the Refutation of the Ismāʿīliyya: The*

2.4.2 Discovering the Prophet's Marvels

In the earliest theological debates between Muslims and Christians, Muslim scholastic discourse (*kalam*) had not yet centered, or even necessarily accepted, purported miracles of the Prophet that were already circulating in popular discourse. This might explain why we find John of Damascus (d. 724 CE) charging that Muslims are unable to substantiate the claims of their "false prophet" because he had produced no miracles, suggesting that Muslim apologists were not yet known to rely on miracles in apologies for their Prophet.[106] However, the doctrine of the Qur'ān's inimitability alone soon proved insufficient for meeting the demands of debate. As is clear from John's critique, for Christians, failure to produce miracles was a disqualifying factor in one's claim to prophethood, not only because Christians could point to the many miracles prophets in the Bible perform, but also because the Qur'ān admits some of these miracles, while also seeming to deny Muḥammad any (excepting the Qur'ān). Thus, Christian anti-Islamic polemics found pride in miracles attributed to Christ, and Islam "found itself in a

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Kitāb Ithbāt Nubuwwat al-Nabī *by the Zaydī al-Mu'ayyad bi-llāh al-Hārūnī* (d. 411/1020) (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 120-153; Lara Harb, "Form, Content, and the Inimitability of the Qur'ān in ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī's Works," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 18, no. 3 (2015): 301-321. On how Qur'ānic inimitability relates to features unique to the Text's Arabic and the question of its translatability, see now, Khalid Yahya Blankinship, *The Inimitable Qur'ān: Some Problems in English Translations of the Qur'ān with Reference to Rhetorical Features* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

[106] Stroumsa, "The Signs of Prophecy," 106. Josef Horovitz (d. 1931), long ago, argued that in John's time, Muslims had not yet begun to use prophetic miracles in disputations, since "the miracles of the Prophet were still far from being a generally accepted article of faith." Instead, early disputations tended to focus on conceptions of monotheism and issues in Christology; see Josef Horovitz, "The Growth of the Mohammed Legend," *The Muslim World* 10, no. 1 (1919): 50. For an introduction to the importance of John of Damascus in early Christian-Muslim debates, see Sidney H. Griffith, "The Manṣūr Family and Saint John of Damascus: Christians and Muslims in Umayyad Times," in *Christians and Others in the Umayyad State*, eds. Antoine Borrut and Fred M. Donner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 29-51. Likewise, the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I (d. 823 CE) argued that the Qur'ān was not confirmed by miracles from Muḥammad, and as van Ess writes, "the Christians appear to have regarded this as their most powerful argument at the time." See Josef van Ess, *Theology and Society*, 4:701-702. Cf. van Ess, *Theology and Society*, 3:25.

strategically unfavourable position" compared to the Christians who were now able to point out that Jesus had been much more convincing in that respect.[107]

Increasingly, it became important that Muḥammad be associated with supernatural miracles which rivaled those associated with prophets in the Judeo-Christian tradition, and this coincided with the wider circulation of miracle narratives for Muḥammad. As God supported the ancient prophets with the supernatural, many of whom were recognized by non-Muslim interlocutors, so too He must have done for His prophet Muḥammad. As Abdulsater explains, the quest for Muḥammad's miracles "must have been given added urgency by the ambiguity of the Quran concerning" miracles for Muḥammad, "especially in view of its clarity in reporting the miracles of other prophets and the need for Muslims to defend their faith."[108] Even al-Jāḥiẓ, whose interests lie primarily in presenting the revelatory Text as proof of its own divine origins, is subject to the force of a widespread proliferation of miracle narratives, and states that the widespread transmission of reports about the Prophet's miracles, which argues for their reality, itself constitutes a sort of proof for his status as Prophet.[109] And yet, al-Jāḥiẓ's discussion of the Prophet's miracles reflects some ambivalence on the miraculous feats associated with the Prophet. His discussion of Muḥammad's wonders is glaringly sparing in detail, and noticeably, the miraculous feats he does specify do not stretch credulity in the same way those which are routinely discussed in other texts might. Here, there is no mention of the Night Journey and Heavenly Ascent, nor of the Splitting of the Moon. Instead, he speaks for example, of incidents when the Prophet called on to God for or

[107] Van Ess, *Theology and Society*, 4:702.
[108] Abdulsater, "Full Texts," 50.
[109] Al-Jāḥiẓ *Ḥujaj*, 3:260; van Ess, *Theology and Society*, 4:130; Stroumsa, "The Signs of Prophecy," 107.

against certain persons and/or groups, and then God caused what Muḥammad had sought to pass, such as a long-lasting drought for a relentless enemy faction, or much-needed rain for another faction.[110] One suspects that al-Jāḥiẓ might have harbored suspicions about certain miracle narratives, given that he was in fact a student of, and transmits from, Abū Isḥāq al-Niẓẓām, the notorious Muʿtazilī skeptic.[111] Though there is some debate on al-Jāḥiẓ's factional commitments, that he denied the Splitting of the Moon is corroborated by at least one early scholar, Abū ʿAlī al-Marzūqī (d. 421/1030).[112] The point here is that even when Muslim apologists began to further the case for Muḥammad's prophethood as characterized by miracles, there was at least for a time, some debate as to the extent to which credulous stretching miracles could be admitted.

Despite Qur'ānic silence on public miracles of Prophet Muḥammad, The Muḥammad we find in post-Qur'ānic literature is one whom God surrounds with a plethora of supernatural marvels throughout his life, from birth to adulthood. Such miracles are primarily transmitted in various genres which involve extra-Qur'ānic reconstructions of Muḥammad's life, particularly the *sīrah* ("prophetic biography") literature and the *ḥādīth*. They also become integral to the *ithbāt* (establishing prophethood) literature. For example, Abu Ḥātim Muḥammad Ibn Idrīs al-Rāzī (d. 277/890) dedicates an entire chapter of his *Aʿlām al-Nubuwwah* (Indications of Prophethood) to multiple *dalā'il* (miraculous indications) of Muḥammad's prophethood *besides* the Qur'ān.[113] One example of such miracles which recur in the traditions is

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[110] Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Ḥujaj*, 3:267-269.
[111] Abū Bakr Aḥmad Ibn ʿAlī al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071), *Tārīkh Baghdād*, ed. Bashshār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2002), 14:124
[112] Abū ʿAlī Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Mazrūqī, *al-Azminah wa al-Amkinah*, ed. Khalīl al-Manṣūr (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1996), 86.
[113] Abū Ḥāṭim al-Rāzī, *Aʿlām al-Nubuwwah*, eds. Ṣalāḥ al-Ṣāwī and Ghulām Riḍā (Tehran: Anjuman-I Shāhanshāhī Falsafah-ī, 1977), 199-224.

appropriately characterized by Khalidi as the "birth as illumination" myth.[114] This account has it that the Prophet's mother, Āminah, described her experience in delivering the Prophet as follows:

> When he detached from me, a light came out with him which lit the distance from east to west. Then he fell to the ground, supporting himself with his hands. He then took a handful of earth in his fist and raised his head to the heavens.
>
> Others narrate that he fell on his knees, raising his head to the heavens. With him there shone forth a light which lit up the palaces of al-Shām [the Levant], until I could see the necks of camels in Buṣrā.[115]

These reports are clearly intended to reflect early omens of Muḥammad's stature with God, to show that his status as Prophet and Messenger of God is anticipated long before his mission formally begins at age forty. Various other narratives show Muḥammad as miraculously sheltered from the sins of the *Jāhiliyyah* (a Qur'ānic term for pre-Islamic ignorance or barbarism which Islam combatted) such that even in his youth, he manages to abstain (including through divine intervention) from the polytheism practiced by his peers, and from disreputable conduct, generally. In one instance, young Muḥammad, generally far removed from the morally suspect, shows a rare interest in finding out what the youth get up to when they spend the night in gaiety as they are wont to do. As he enters into the city, he stumbles upon a raucous wedding night party which he considers joining, until God suddenly causes him to sleep, not arising until the next morning. When he awakes, having missed the opportunity to join the festivities, and not quite yet fully

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[114] Khalidi, *Images of Muhammad*, 69
[115] Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, 1:81. Cf. Khālidi, *Images of Muhammad*, 68-69.

grasping the gravity of what had transpired, he considers joining again. After the like occurs once more, he decides never again to turn to such frivolities.[116]

Such stories began to circulate widely alongside increasing contact between Muslims and the non-Muslim populations they conquered, "bearers of ancient cultural and religious traditions with a rich lore of prophetical beliefs and stories," [117] so that it is no surprise Muslim lore in certain aspects began to mirror that of its non-Muslim counterparts. Further, stories of Prophet Muḥammad's miracles had such success at popular levels that "it was not possible to keep up with the development," and thus, miracle narratives "proliferated unchecked."[118] The circulation of miracle stories can be established as an early phenomenon; we find them already in fragments which survive in both the *[Prophetic] Biographies* (*sīra*) of Mūsā b. ʿUqbah (55-141/675-758) and Wahb b. Munabbih (d. 110/728 or 114/732),[119] which, given that these scholars are *reporting* traditions that have come to them, indicate that such traditions had already permeated into scholarly discourse likely by the end of the first Islamic century. Indeed, Josef Horovitz, in his insightful analysis of the *sīrah* literature, concluded that "this figure of the miracle-performing Prophet must have become crystallized during the last quarter of the first century of the Hijra."[120]

As aforementioned, the development of a wonder-working Muḥammad cannot be disentangled from Muslim interactions with their religious others. For one, the famous

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[116] Abū Ḥātim Muḥammad Ibn Ḥibbān, *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān*, eds. Muḥammad ʿAlī Sūnmaz and Khāliṣ Āy Damīr (Beirut: Dār Ibn Hazm, 2012), 4:12-13. For a discussion on this and other accounts about Muḥammad's life prior to his prophethood, see Khalidi, *Images of Muhammad,* 70-75.
[117] Kister*,* "The Sirah Literature," 335
[118] Van Ess, *Theology and Society*, 4:701
[119] Kister, "The Sirah Literature," 356-357;
[120] Horovitz, "The Growth of the Mohammed Legend," 53. See also Andreas Görke, "Muhammad," in *The Wiley Blackwell Concise Companion to the Ḥadith*, ed. Daniel Brown (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 75-90.

caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 170-193/786-809) relies on such "proofs of prophethood" in a letter sent to the Byzantines. The letter, more bureaucratic than theological in nature, amounts to a summons to Byzantines that they resume tributary payments. But, the letter also mentions the then-standard preliminary invitation to convert to Islam in such addresses to Christian subjects. This appeal provides a list of proofs of Muḥammad's prophethood, including prophecies from the Bible.[121] In the main, Hārūn's letter is not much different from other state-initiated correspondence which precedes it; however, what was new was that Hārūn mentioned miracles wrought by Muḥammad, ostensibly in order to convince the Byzantine emperor of their truth.[122] In this letter, van Ess explains, we find "the earliest apology of Muḥammad's prophethood."[123] Shortly after, Hārūn's son and now Caliph, al-Ma'mūn (r. 198/813-218/833), is credited with commissioning what is thought to be the earliest, standalone compilation of such "proofs of prophethood" (*dalā'il al-nubuwwah*), appropriately titled *Aʿlām al-Nubuwwah* ("Signs of Prophethood").[124]

It would seem that it is through this process of increased interest in "Proofs of Prophethood" that a natural phenomenon like a lunar eclipse, which initially serves as one among other natural cosmological qua eschatological signs, became an extraordinary splitting of the moon *specifically* for confirmation of Prophet Muḥammad's status; the

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[121] Van Ess, *Theology and Society*, 3:25.
[122] The letter was written by a certain Muhammad Ibn al-Layth on behalf of Harun al-Rashid. Van Ess and Kister have both argued that Ibn al-Layth is primarily responsible for the polemics in the letter, and that he was influenced by Muʿtazilī thought. See van Ess, *Theology and Society*, 3:27-28, and Kister, "The Sīrah Literature, 355. Importantly, ʿAbd al-Jabbār observed that the letter was composed after Ibn al-Layth carefully pored over the "books of the foreigners" (i.e., non-Muslim theologians) and exhausted all that was available with respect to the markers of prophethood, alerting us to the foreground of engagement with interfaith polemics. See al-Qāḍī ʻAbd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah*, 1:77-78.
[123] Van Ess, *Theology and Society*, 3:27.
[124] Kister, "The Sirah Literature," 355.

incident "changes from a sign that Muḥammad merely interprets into a miracle of the most powerful kind."[125] On this, Rubin writes perceptively that in their "yearning for a new Muḥammad," Muslims of various camps came to disapprove "any attempt at a rationalistic interpretation of the Qur'ānic moon passage and deplored whoever tried to suggest as much."[126] We saw that earlier on, in discussing the Night Journey and Ascent, Ibn Isḥāq presents the miraculous (physical) reading alongside the nonmiraculous one, both as equally acceptable, and suggests a preference for the nonmiraculous. The picture is different by the time we reach the famous Sunnī exegete Muḥammad Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabari (d. 310/923). After dedicating multiple pages to presenting various, conflicting accounts of the nature of the events (e.g., Was it by body? By spirit? Did he journey in bodily form but without alighting from the Burāq and praying at the Sacred Temple, etc.), al-Ṭabari then states authoritatively that "according to us, the correct view" is that this was a bodily journey. Afterall, he asks, what challenge lies in a claim to a spiritual journey? A fair question, to be sure, for it is not so incredulous that one might have visionary experiences while asleep.[127] Given the preceding discussion however, it is clear that the ready willingness we find in the likes of Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) to advocate so strongly for the physical journey and the dismissive attitude toward other readings, goes beyond loyalty to the Text, and results in part from these new ways in

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[125] Rubin, "Muhammad's Message in Mecca," 47.
[126] Rubin, "Muhammad's Message in Mecca," 58; also echoed in Kecia Ali, *The Lives of Muhammad* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 24. For an example of an authoritative voice reflecting this turn, see al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), who on the relevant verse (Q 54:1), writes summarily that this refers to "the time of the Messenger of God when he was in Mecca…when the disbelievers of Mecca demanded a sign from him, so the Messenger of God showed them the Splitting of the Moon, as a sign and proof of the truth of his words, and the reality of his prophethood." Al-Ṭabarī shows the incident as bring presented in *response* to demands for a sign and goes on to present various accounts to this effect, without mentioning accounts that suggest the "split" as incidental. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, 22:565-570.
[127] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, 17:350; for his treatment of the *isrā'* in full, see 17:329-350.

which Muslim prophetology sought to establish "the Prophet's elevation to his superior rank vis-à-vis the other prophets."[128]

In time, Muslim theologians became more explicit in their understanding that miracles were *crucial* in establishing prophethood; thus we find the Muʿtazilī ʿAbd al-Jabbār stating in his *al-Mughni* (Summa) that the only conclusive proof that one has been sent as a messenger from God is a miracle (*muʿjiz*) which cannot be replicated.[129] Elsewhere in his *Kiāb al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah* (*Concerning the Five Principles)*, [130] ʿAbd al-Jabbār writes, after mentioning the argument from Qur'ānic *iʿjāz*:

> [Additional] evidence that [Muḥammad] was a true prophet is that he fed a crowd of people with little food; and he beckoned to a tree and it stretched out [toward him] with nothing pulling or pushing it; and he put his hand in a basin with [little] water in it, and then it [the water] gushed from between his fingers until the people drank and performed ablution from it; and small stones swam in his palm. All of the foregoing are beyond human capabilities.[131]

Since humans are incapable of such acts, the scholar explains, these miracles establish Muḥammad as a "true prophet" and thus obliges us to "accept what he command us to do and prohibits us from doing;" so too, it obliges us to accept that "the Qur'ān is the speech of God and that we must act in accordance with it."[132] With this, ʿAbd al-Jabbār reflects what became the standard view held by most theologians including the Sunnī Ashʿarīs

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[128] Angelika Neuwirth, "From the Sacred Mosque to the Remote Temple," 387, in reference to the symbolism in the Night Journey and Ascent narratives, and yet applicable to the genre of Muhammad's miracles broadly.

[129] Al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī fī Abwāb al-Tawḥīd wa al-ʿAdl*, ed. Maḥmūd al-Khuḍayrī and Mahmūd Muḥammad Qāsim (Cairo: al-Dār al-Miṣriyyah li'l-Ta'līf wa'l-Tarjamah, 1965), 15:148.

[130] A manuscript for the original text, once considered lost, was discovered and published alongside a French translation in Daniel Gimaret, "les uṣūl al ḫamsa du qāḍī ʿabd al ğabbār et leurs commentaires," *Annales Islamologiques* 15 (1979): 44-78. The Arabic text is found on pp. 79-96. There is also an English translation in Martin and Woodward, *Defenders of Reason*, 90-115. Unfortunately, ʿAbd al-Jabbār's own commentary to his work, which he wrote after penning the base text, is now lost, though there exists another commentary by his (alleged) student and near contemporary, Mānkdīm Shashdīw (d. ca. 425/1034), which I discuss below.

[131] ʿAbd al-Jabbār, in Gimaret, *Les uṣūl al-hamsa*, 90. The translation provided here is partially adapted from that provided in Martin and Woodward, *Defenders of Reason*, 103.

[132] Gimaret, "les uṣūl al ḫamsa," 90

and the Muʿtazilah in common, that miracles were vital in confirming the divine provenance of the Prophet Muḥammad's proclamations.[133]

2.4.3 The Muʿjizah *and the Question of Nature*

These developments in Muslim prophetology fed into emerging conceptions of the prophetic *Muʿjizah* (apologetic miracle). As the aforementioned doctrine of the Qur'ān's inimitability, first elaborated by the Muʿtazilites, was adopted by other schools of Islamic theology, it became standard to assert that Prophecy required the *Muʿjizah* as proof. Linguistically, the term *Muʿjizah* denotes that which incapacitates or more loosely, "that which is incapacitating," in the sense that others are incapable of replicating it. As the term functions in Islamic thought, it may be rendered as the "apologetic miracle." As Wensick explains in his study on Islamic creeds, the *muʿjizāt* are those miracles which God grants prophets "to prove their vocation and their sincerity, in such a way that their opponents are silenced."[134] While theologians asserted that the Qur'ān itself was the greatest of the *muʿjizāt* granted Muḥammad, the wide circulation and adoption of other extramundane miracles prompted discussions on the question of causality in the universe.

Though debates on causality were quite involved, the questions most relevant to our concerns may be summarized in the following: if supernatural miracles are to be affirmed, then does this not endanger a common-sense assumption that we all seem to take for granted in our daily lives, that natural phenomena are affected by causality? If I am to make it to the other side of the closed door, we take it for granted that the barrier

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[133] It should be noted that in Islamic theology, the apologetic miracle is not the only indication of prophethood; it must coincide with other factors, not least of which is excellence in moral character. For more on this, see Yusuf Rahman, "The Doctrine of *Muʿjiza* According to the Schools of *kalām* in the Classical Period," *Islamic Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (1996): 247.

[134] A. J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, 224.

between myself and that other side must needs be removed (e.g., by opening the door, or by some other means). It is due to the intuitive assumption of causality that I do not simply run head-first through the door without first ensuring it is open. The assumption of causality also has moral consequences. Consider the common case of manslaughter by reckless driving; when X's car, driving at 100mph, rams into pedestrian Y, and this coincides with Y's sudden death, we feel secure in concluding that X's driving is *causally involved* in the death of Y. Common-sense reasoning would reject the suggestion that Y's death "just-so-happens" to occur upon the impact of X's car, or that X's driving is not somehow *instrumental* in the death of Y. In short, we take one as morally responsible for the death of another to some extent, if a causal link can be established between a set of negligible and/or irresponsible actions of one, and the death of the other. Absent this assumption of causality, one cannot make sense of either legal, or moral accountability.[135]

And yet, if Jesus, fully human by most accounts, could walk on water, then it cannot be said that there is something *essential* to the nature of water and/or humans that should *necessarily* prevent humans from walking on water; if God can prevent Abraham from burning when his enemies throw him into the fire, as suggested in the Qur'ānic story (Q 21:68-70), then it cannot be said that fire, by its very nature, necessarily burns inflammables. Although by the end of the third/ninth century most surviving Islamic schools had come to accept prophetic miracles which seemed to break the laws of nature, heresiographers reveal to us that this was for a time, a contentious matter. Thus, the tradition speaks of Baghdādī Muʿtazilites who believed firmly in natural causality as

[135] This presentation of how causation functions in moral and legal responsibility is admittedly a simple one that avoids the complications of a such a heady topic.

precluding supernatural miracles, among them Muʿammar Ibn ʿAbbād (d. 215/830) and Abū Isḥāq al-Naẓẓām (d. c. 220/835).[136] So too, we are told that Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī (d. 319/931), chief of the Baghdādī Muʿtazilite school in the early fourth/tenth century, is said to have "held a certain self-determination for the created world, and believe[d] in the existence of natural qualities (*ṭabīʿah*) which determine the functioning of bodies."[137] Thus, As El Omari states, summarizing the teachings of the Muʿtazilite al-Hākim al-Jushamī (d. 494/1101), "nature is a characteristic that fashions things (meaning bodies that are agents) on other bodies or just bodies who act on themselves."[138] For Abū al-Qāsim al-Kaʿbī, God "made for each thing a natural characteristic (*khāṣṣiyyah*) against which each thing reacts (*yanfaʿil ʿanhā*), such as wheat generating wheat, and a clot generating seeds."[139] In other words, bodies are causally determined by their *natural* characteristics, *and* the *natural* characteristics of other bodies which act on them. Likewise, the Shiʿī scholar of *kalām*, al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022) explains that for him, in agreement with Abū al-Qāsim al-Kaʿbī:

> natures are determinant cause (*maʿānī*) inhering (*taḥillu*) in substances (*jawhar*) by which the action is prepared to be done. The eye, for example, and the natural disposition (*ṭabīʿah*) inherent therein, which predispose it to have sensation and perception…and, for example, the existence of nature in the fire by which it blazes, and by virtue of which the fire burns combustible things…*This [too] is the doctrine of Abū al-Qāsim al-Kaʿbī*."[140]

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[136] There is some debate regarding the extent to which these two reflect the entire Baghdādī school; because that faction was eclipsed by the Basran Muʿtazilite school, we simply do not have enough material from the Baghdādīs to make a definitive conclusion. See Rahman, "Doctrine of Muʿjiza," 243; Harry A, Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 559-578. The al-Naẓẓām mentioned here is the same figure discussed above who rejected the Splitting of the Moon as a miracle.
[137] Rahman, "Doctrine of Muʿjiza," 236.
[138] El Omari, *Theology of Abū l-Qāsim*, 179.
[139] al-Ḥākim al-Jushamī (d. 494/1101), *Sharḥ ʿUyūn al-Masā'il*, cited and translated in Racha El Omari, *The Theology of Abū l-Qāsim al-Balkhī/al-Kaʿbī* (d. 319/931) (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 179. El Omari cites a manuscript which remains unpublished; unfortunately, I have not yet been able to access the text. However, the association of this teaching with al-Kaʿbī is confirmed in other sources; see the fn. which next follows.
[140] Translated in Rahman, "Muʿjiza," 236, retained here with modifications; emphasis mine. For the Arabic, see al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, *Awā'il al-Maqālāt fī al-Madhāhib al-Mukhtārāt*, ed. Faḍl Allāh Zanjānī and Hibat al-Dīn Muḥammad Shahrastānī (Tabrīz: Maktabat Ḥaqīqat, 1951), 82-83.

On this understanding, nature fashions specific reactions when specific bodies collide in specific circumstances; these reactions are determined by natural qualities inhering in these bodies, and by the surrounding circumstances. Thus, when a piece of paper interacts with fire, the characteristics of both substances causes the fire to burn the paper and the paper to be burnt by the fire (fire being something that combusts, and paper being combustible), and so on. Expressed alternatively, "There is in wheat a natural (and distinct) characteristic (*khāṣṣiyyah*), such that it would not be possible for barley to grow from it, as long as its nature (*ṭabīʿah*) and natural characteristic (*khāṣṣiyyah*) are in it."[141]

This discussion hinges on a conception of God's abilities as in some way delimited. For Abū al-Qāsim al-Kaʿbī, it is not conceivable to speak of God as capable of opposing natural causation; God cannot cause barley to grow from wheat, nor is it possible for God to "create from a human drop of sperm (*nuṭfa*) another animal;"[142] likewise, "fire always affects that which it touches in the same way," that is, for any given x, *whenever* it comes into contact with fire, the same result particular to this interaction will occur (all things being equal).[143] However, this faction was swimming against a rising current of theologians who adopted doctrines which in spite of their variations, amounted to a rejection of nature; indeed, in El Omari's reading, Abū al-Qāsim al-Kaʿbī was the "last noteworthy proponent" of natural causality in his school, standing "at the end of a long tradition of early Muʿtazilī supporters," as Basran

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[141] Abū Rashīd al-Nīsābūrī (d. ca. 415/1024), *al-Masā'il fī-l-khilāf bayna al-Baṣriyyīn wa al-Baghdādiyyīn*, eds. Maʿan Ziyādah and Riḍwān al-Sayyid (Beirut: Maʿhad al-Inmā' al-ʿArabī, 1979), 133; translated in El Omari, *Theology of Abū l-Qāsim*, 178 (retained here with modifications).
[142] Abū Rashīd al-Nīsābūrī, *al-Masā'il fī-l-khilāf*, 133; translated in El Omari, *Theology of Abū l-Qāsim*, 178 (retained here); so too, al-Mufīd states it is impossible for heavy objects to stand alone, suspended in thin air, and associates this view with Abū al-Qāsim al-Kaʿbī as well. See al-Shakyh al-Mufīd, *Awā'il al-Maqālāt*, 108; Rahman, "Muʿjiza," 237.
[143] El Omari, *Theology of Abū l-Qāsim*, 181.

Muʿtazilite, and Ashʿarī opposition to nature would soon dominate Muslim theological discourse writ large.[144]

2.4.4 Occasionalism and the Rejection of Nature

Despite Baghdādī Muʿtazilī efforts, most Muslim theologians came to deny their conception of "inherent nature" in natural phenomena, no doubt in the interest of securing a totalizing perception of God's omnipotence which thus provided the rationale for accepting apologetic miracles. For the Basran Muʿtazilites, all natural phenomena is *directly* caused by God so that God can indeed allow a heavy body to defy gravity by suspending it in the air on its own.[145] As opposed to speaking of "nature," the Basrans spoke of *ʿādah* (custom), that is to say, the conventional, or customary ways in which God tends to cause natural phenomena to behave; it is not that fire *necessarily* burns, but rather that God tends to cause it to burn. It is not that the sun must rise from the east, but that God has a habit, a custom, of causing it to rise from the east. All things are God's creation and are always subject to His command, so God may freely choose to depart from His convention at any time, for some wisdom known to Him (and potentially

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[144] El Omari, 181. For more on the Ashʿarī argument regarding the *muʿjiza*, see Richard J. McCarthy, "Al-Bāqillānī's Notion of the Apologetic Miracle," *Studia Biblica et Orientalia* (Biblical Institute Press, 1959), 3:247-256; Isra Yazicioglu, "Redifining the Miraculous: al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd and Said Nursi on Qur'anic miracle Stories," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 13, no. 2 (2011): 86-108.

[145] Rahman, "The Doctrine of *Muʿjiza*" 15; the Muʿtazilite system makes an important exception for human acts, which they argue, are caused by humans themselves; this was the Muʿtazilite approach to securing the individual's free will and responsibility for her own actions. In opposition to the Muʿtazilah, the Ashʿarīs came to accept a thoroughgoing occasionalism which posited God as the causal agent of all created phenomena, *including* human acts. The question of how to harmonize between divine omnipotence and human freewill/responsibility was among the key issues which divided the Muʿtazilah and the ʿAshʿarīs. Both sought to maintain omnipotence and human responsibility but ultimately, in their solutions to this problem, one gave priority to human free will/responsibility (the Muʿtazilah) while the other gave priority to securing divine omnipotence (the Ashʿarīs). For a discussion on the Muʿatzilite approach to human accountability, see Ulrich Rudolph, "Occasionalism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 349-354.See also Martin and Woodward, *Defenders of Reason*, 11-12. On both parties placed in conversation with one another, see Richard M. Frank, "The Structure of Created Causality According to Al-Ashʿarī: An Analysis of the 'Kitāb al-Lumāʿ," *Studia Islamica* 25 (1966): 13-75.

discoverable to human reason). However, for the same Basran Muʿtazilites, the only time in which God departs from His custom in public view is for the purpose of proving a prophet's authenticity via a *Muʿjizah*.[146] In his *Summa*, ʿAbd al-Jabbār presents four conditions for a prophetic *Muʿjizah*:

1.) It must come from God, directly or indirectly.
2.) It must depart from the custom (*ʿādah*) of so-called "nature" to which the audience is accustomed.
3.) Other humans must be unable to reproduce it.
4.) It must occur only with those who claim prophethood.[147]

As to the first condition, an heir to ʿAbd al-Jabbār's thought, Mānkdīm Shashdīw (d. 425/1034),[148] notes in his own commentary on the teacher's *al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah* (The Five Foundation Principles), that the indirect miracle is that feat which is theoretically possible for humans, even if implausible, such as the unexpected destruction of multiple cities by an extremely weak force. Such actions, though caused by God, are mediated through humans. Direct miracles however are those which break the laws of nature as we know it. These are prophetic miracles tailored to their audience. The third condition establishes the condition of inimitability, while the last ensures that nature-defying miracles can *only* be expected of prophets, thus denying miracles for any others.[149] Ashʿarīs came to accept this Muʿtazilī definition of miracles in the main, though they

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[146] Al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Ḥamdānī, *al-Mughnī*, 15:183.
[147] ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, 15:199; cf. Yusuf Rahman, "The Doctrine of *Muʿjiza*," 245.
[148] That is, Aḥmad Ibn al-Ḥusayn Ibn Abī Hāshim al-Ḥusayni al-Qazwīnī, known as Mānkdīm Shashdīw (d. c.425/1034); Mānkdīm (whose name, originally Persian, is vowelized differently), was himself a student and follower of the Zaydī scholar (with Muʿtazilite leanings)), Imām Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Mu'ayyad Billāh (d. 1020), who in turn, was a direct student of ʿAbd al-Jabbār. It is not clear if Mānkdīm, who reportedly attended ʿAbd al-Jabbār's funeral, was a student of the latter. In any case, it would seem that his primary scholar in *kalam* must have been his own teacher, al-Mu'ayyad billah. On Mānkdīm, see David Thomas, C*hristian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographic History: Volume 2 (900-1050)*, eds. David Thomas and Alex Mallett (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 662-664; and, Hasan Ansari, "The Shī'ī Reception of Muʿtazilism (I): Zaydīs" in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, 187-188.
[149] Aḥmad Ibn al-Ḥusayn Mānkdīm Shashdīw, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, ed. ʿAbd al-Karīm ʿUthmān (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba li'l-Ṭabāʿah wa al-Nashr, 1965), 569-571.

found the last condition unacceptable, for it meant that the *karāmah* of saints could not be accepted, an issue that we will take up in forthcoming chapters.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to trace the development of an elevated role for Muḥammadan miracles in Islamic thought, beginning towards the end of the first century of Islam, and taking on a more defined shape in the third/ninth century onwards. The following factors are most prominent in this development: First, there is the Qur'ān's depiction of prophets as typically presenting with miracles, and then, the need to present Muḥammad in a similar light. Despite the Qur'ān's reticence on Muḥammadan miracles, by the end of the first Islamic century, the Prophet's biography in the popular imaginary had transformed to admit stupefying incidents which rivaled those of prophets before him. This was informed by Muslim interactions with their non-Muslim neighbors of Jewish and Christian. This influence is particularly evident in the role *muʿjizāt* came to play in *kalām*. As both Muslims and Christians came to see miracles as essential to establishing prophethood, both Ashʿarīs and Muʿtazilites adopted narrations corroborating the Prophet's miracles, which they then marshalled toward defending Muḥammad's position as Prophet and Messenger of God. With both parties accepting prophetic miracles, this gave rise to the questions which we address in chapters to come: whether miracles existed for those closest in spiritual rank to the prophets, the *awliyā'*, and if so, how such miracles were to be distinguished from the prophetic *Muʿjizah*.

CHAPTER 3: THE FRIENDS OF GOD (*AWLIYĀ' ALLĀH*) IN EARLY ḤADĪTH LITERATURE

3.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I described how miracles grew in importance over the course of the first three Islamic centuries in tandem with a developing Islamic prophetology. I advanced the position that displaying miracles were marginal to Prophet Muḥammad's mission, as evident in the Qur'ān presenting itself as Muḥammad's miracle *par excellence*, and the routine resistance to requests for other miracles at the hands of the Prophet. Yet, already by the end of the first/seventh century, and alongside increasing discourse with Judeo-Christian interlocutors, reports of Muḥammadan miracles were circulating in Muslim circles through extra-Qur'ānic accounts of the Prophet's life, and by the third/ninth century, miracles had risen to become a necessary condition for prophethood in Muslim theology.

In the absence of the Prophet as an accessible intermediary between humankind and the Divine, whose proximity with God also manifested in working wonders (or so most came to understand), Muslims came to conceive of a cohort of spiritual elites who in essence, inherit the charisma of the Prophet. Knowledge on this spiritual elite found its way into extra-Qur'ānic traditions circulating in the first Islamic centuries, and it is to this received knowledge that we now turn. In this chapter, I present early Muslim discourse on the *Awliyā'* as spiritual heirs of the Prophet, as reported in the most authoritative extra-Qur'ānic literature in Islamic scholarship, namely, the *ḥadīth*. As we will see in forthcoming chapters, the *Awliyā'* as heirs to the Prophet also entailed that they, as did the Prophet, would perform miracles too. This chapter will show that as with the image of the super-legendary Muḥammad, the notion of perpetual spiritual heirs to the Prophet

existing in a hierarchy can be traced to at least the end of the first Islamic century, with increased attention to the *Awliyā'* especially after the third/ninth century, thus paving the way for the onset of more systematic treatments on saintly miracles in the fourth and early fifth Islamic centuries.

3.1 The Beloved of God in the Qur'ān

In the Qur'ān, we find kernels that come to serve as foundational proof texts for the conception of friendship and intimacy with God (*wilāyah*) which matures in the post-Qur'ānic period. While there is surely a Qur'ānic notion of divine intimacy for select individuals, this picture does not directly mirror the conception of *wilāyah* that appears after the Prophet. The Qur'ān's intimates of God share with the post-Qur'ānic *Awliyā'* in a very general sense, in that God is pleased with them, and so they find favor with Him in this world, and in the next world; they are to be rewarded with Paradise and with the company of God and His beloved. For example, we are told that those who obey God and the Prophet will enter Paradise into the company of "the Prophets, the True, the Witnesses, and the Righteous; How excellent are they as companions!" (Q 4:69). While the paradisiacal pleasures of God's intimates are elaborated in the Qur'ān, the substance of those favors bestowed in *this* world is not as robustly articulated as in the post-Qur'ānic literature. Instead, the Qur'ān depicts a general welfare and peace of mind bestowed on the *Awliyā'* in the now. In the Qur'ān, those who best correspond to the latter-day conception of the *Awliyā'* are not pious individuals from the ranks of commonfolk, but are instead, individuals explicitly recognized as prophets who, as explored in the previous chapter, are routinely depicted as beneficiaries of supernatural divine favors in public view. Moreover, there is hardly any discussion of God's intimates

as patron saints for the believers at large, an important aspect of the post-Qur'ānic *Awliyā'* by virtue of whom, it will be said, Muslims receive divine aid and protection, and at whose hands God bestows miracles, often publicly, to demonstrate His favor over them. That the mature concept of *wilāyah* is primarily a post-Qur'ānic development is perhaps most clear in the contrast between how it and related terms are conceived later, and how they function in the Qur'ān. To explain my point, it would be useful to first explain the polysemic nature of the words *wilāyah*, *walī*, and other related terms.

The base verb from which the concept of Friendship originates, *waliya*, denotes "to be near, close to someone," or as Badawi and Abdel Haleem explain, "adjacency,"[150] so that the *walī* is one who is near/close to another. Thus, the *Awliyā' Allāh*, the Friends of God, are those who share spiritual proximity to God. In turn, various other denotations emerge from this. In the Qur'ān, the most common deployment of *walī* is not adequately glossed by the term, "friend," in the sense of a beloved companion; rather, it most frequently refers to one on whom another relies as a source of support in her affairs (rightly or wrongly). When used in this sense, *wilāyah* may translate as allyship, protection, or a combination of the two, depending on the benefactor(s) and the beneficiary(ies) of this *wilāyah.* At times the *walī* can be glossed simply as "ally," and in certain cases, as "guardian" or "protector."[151] Often, the Qur'ān speaks of God as the sole *walī* for humans, that is, God is the only one on whom humans can turn to for protection and support, the one to whom they can entrust their affairs. As *The* Protector (*al-Walī*),

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[150] Elsaid M. Badawi and Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'anic Usage* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 1047.

[151] Thus, Badawi and Abdel Haleem place "protector, patron, ally" first in their entry on *walī*. See Badawi and Abdel Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, 1048. See also Hanna E. Kassis, *A Concordance of the Qur'ān* (Berkeley: UCLA Press, 1983), 1277.

the Qur'ān posits, it is God alone that is deserving of worship. Therefore, to the polytheistic nonbelievers, the Qur'ān states, "You have no other *walī* besides Him [i.e., God], and no one to intercede for you. Will you not then take heed?" (Q 32:4).[152] In contrast to those who rightly take God as their *walī*, the Qur'ān speaks of those who are deluded into taking Satan as their *walī*, who in so doing, "suffer a great loss" (4:119).[153] In the Qur'ān's essentially binary moral worldview, to rely on other-than-God is to rely on evil, wittingly or unwittingly. Thus, the Qur'ān states of such individuals, "They took the devils as their *Awliyā'*, instead of God, though they think themselves rightly guided" (7:30). This connotation of protection and allyship is also found in verses that use *wilāyah* in encouraging commitment to the cause of the believers, and admonishing against defection to the side of evil, e.g., "Those who take the disbelievers as *Awliyā'* as opposed to the believers, do they seek power with them? Certainly, all power belongs to God" (4:139).[154]

Therefore, the primary deployment of the term *wilāyah* in discussing God-human relations in the Qur'ān is to implore human recognition of God's exclusive power to

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[152] Other such verses include "He it is who sends down the rain after they have given up hope, and spreads His mercy. He is the *Walī*, the Praiseworthy" (Q 42:28); "He gives life and death; you have no *walī* besides him, nor any helper" (Q 9:116). See also Q 29:22 and Q 42:31.

[153] In various other instances, the Qur'an refers to Satan deceiving his own "*awliyā'*," e.g., Q 16:63, and Q 18:50.

[154] This is clearly a warning against allying oneself with the wrong cause where security and/or power is at stake. See also Q 5:51-56, which is concerned with advising believers against the temptation to cross sides and join the disbelievers in a context of tension and conflict. The verses warn those "with disease in their hearts, who hasten" to the disbelievers saying, "we fear misfortune may strike us." They also call to hope in the cause of the believers, for "perhaps God will bring victory…so that they [those who defect] will come to regret what they hid in their hearts" (Q 5:52). The section is speaking to a historical scenario in Muḥammad's time: at one point, some Muslims must have abandoned their faith (or were on the verge of doing so) due to mounting pressure and persecution at the hands of non-Muslims. Thus, the section threatens that God may well replace the apostates "with a people whom He loves, and who love Him," and then ends with reminding the believers, "your only guardians (*awliyā'*) are God and His messenger and [fellow] believers…and whoever allies themselves with God and His messenger and the believers, then certainly, it is the party of God that will prevail" (Q 5:56). Other instances of God as the Guardian of the believers include Q 7:155, 11:113, 12:101, and 32:4 and *passim*.

protect, to admit that protection is God's alone. Further, when discussing *wilāyah* between God and believers, the Qur'ān overwhelmingly presents God as the subject, the *walī* of Believers, as opposed to the Believers being the *Awliyā'* of God. In other words, it is God's *wilāyah qua* "protection" of the believers that is generally mentioned.[155] Accordingly, while the term *wilāyah* can convey a reciprocal relationship of adjacency and allyship, when in the context of a relationship between God and humans, the overwhelming tendency in the Qur'ān is to speak of God as the *benefactor* of *wilāyah* and humans as beneficiaries—it is essentially an asymmetrical top-down relationship that is depicted; in employing the term, the Qur'ān stresses the denotation of dependency over that of proximity. Indeed, that humans are rarely figured as themselves the *Awliyā'* of God corresponds to the term *walī* in such contexts denoting "Guardian" or "Protector" – it is God that is the "Protector" of the believers, and not the other way around.

The sole affirmation in the Qur'ān of a group of humans as the *Awliyā'* of God (as opposed to God being the *walī* of humans) occurs in Q 10:62: "Certainly, the *Awliyā'* of God, they shall experience no fear, nor shall they grieve." Here, the emphasis is clearly on the human side of God-human *wilāyah*. Here, it is clear that "*walī*" cannot adequately be glossed as "Protector," and instead, this is a reference to those enjoying a special, intimate relationship with God. Therefore, the term may rightly be translated in this case as "Friends."[156] And so, this verse became the primary Qur'ānic reference for the notion

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[155] For God as the *walī* of the believers, see Q 2:257, Q 3:68, and Q 6:126-127.

[156] Thus, Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of The Glorious Koran: An Explanatory Translation* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1930), 216 (note that Pickthall's subdivision of this Qur'ānic chapter deviates slightly from the standard; the verse is listed in his work as 10:63, not 10:62). Also, "they who are close to God," in Asad, *The Message of the Qur'ān*, 339. The more literalist Saheeh International translates *awliyā'* here and elsewhere as "the allies." The Salafi, anti-Sufi sentiments of this translation project notwithstanding, the translators' rendering is fair, given that the context suggests God's *protection* of these individuals on the day of judgment, and so could be read as a reference to the rewards of those who "allied"

of the *Awliyā'* as an exceptional human category of those beloved to God.[157] Yet, the refrain that appears in this verse, "they shall experience no fear, nor shall they grieve," occurs another thirteen times in the Qur'ān (with slight variations), none of which, excepting Q 10:62, refer to the *Awliyā',* and all describing the fruits of those who possess belief and righteous behavior. In other words, the refrain consistently functions in describing some of the rewards promised to the believers generally, e.g., "whosoever believes in God and the Last Day, and performs righteous deeds, *then they shall experience no fear, nor shall they grieve*" (Q 5:69).[158] So, while later Sunnī Islam will point to Q 10:62 as highlighting the special distinction of God's most precious saints, in reality, the merits associated with them in this verse do not set them apart from the rest of the true believers and instead, echo various other depictions of those who will go on to inherit Paradise in the Afterlife. Moreover, the verse arguably focuses primarily, if not exclusively, on the fruits of *wilāyah* attained in the next world. What does *not* emerge from this verse is the concept of the *Awliyā'* as an elite category of believers who, given

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themselves with God. See Emily Assami, Mary Kennedy, & Amatullah Bantley, *Ṣaḥeeḥ International The Qur'ān; Arabic Text with Corresponding English Meanings* (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Abulqasim Publishing House, 1997), 279-280. Ayyub Palmer argues that the Qur'ānic text on these rewards, literally, "there is no fear upon them," means to convey that "others shall not fear for them," (a rendering which the Arabic allows), so that the verse suggests, "none need fear for the *awliyā'* on the Day of Judgment because they will be under the special protection of God." See Ayyub Palmer, *Sainthood and Authority in Early Islam: Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī's Theory of* Wilāyah *and the Reenvisioning of the Sunnī Caliphate* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 7.

[157] See Sara Sviri, *Perspectives on Early Islamic Mysticism: The World of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī and His Contemporaries* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 218. Throughout this chapter, we will see our early Muslim writers allude to this verse on multiple occasions.

[158] This phrase, or its like, where the absence of fear and grief is promised the believers who act righteously appears fourteen times in the Qur'an, six in the second chapter alone (2:38; 2:62; 2:112; 2:262; 2:274; 2:277).

their intimacy with God, enjoy favors in this world, through which they also benefit the rest of the believers.[159]

None of this is to suggest that there is no recognition of distinction among the believers in scripture. Rather, declarations of God's love (*ḥub*) for certain individuals are found throughout the Qur'ān. Sixteen verses speak of God's love for people characterized by specific traits, most frequently, "those who excel in doing good" (the *muḥsinūn*), followed by "those who revere God" (the *muttaqūn*).[160] Typically, these appear at the end of verses exhorting righteous behavior and/or admonishing against evil or general impropriety. In encouraging righteous behavior for example, the Qur'ān states,

> "And hasten toward forgiveness from your Lord, and a Garden whose width is as that of the heavens and the earth, prepared for those who revere God/Those who give [of their wealth both] in [times of] prosperity and adversity, and who restrain their anger, and pardon others—*for God loves those who excel in doing good"* (Q 3:132-134).

On the other hand, twenty-three verses speak of unbecoming traits which God expressly does *not* love—e.g., God does not love those who transgress against others (Q 2:190), God does not love those who spread corruption (Q 5:64), God does not love arrogance (Q 16:23). There is also the oft-cited verse which speaks of "a people whom He loves, and who love Him" (5:54).[161] Another important verse on attaining love of God instructs the Prophet to inform his followers, "Say [O Muḥammad]: If you [truly] love God, [then] follow me, and God will love you" (Q 3:31); this verse, as with the previous, is clear in

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[159] Cf. my analysis to that of Ayyub Palmer, who reads this verse as affirming protection for the Believers on the Day of Judgment; Palmer admits that "this particular passage does not necessarily connote the meaning of closeness to God that is attributed to the word *wilāyah* in most of the classical Arabic dictionaries." Palmer, *Sainthood and Authority in Early Islam*, 7.

[160] William Chittick, "Love in Islamic Thought," *Religion Compass* 8, no. 7 (2014): 231.

[161] As mentioned above in fn. 154, this appears in the context of exhorting against defecting to the side of the antagonistic Meccan polytheists, lest God replace the turncoats with "a people *He loves, and who love Him*."

establishing the possibility of a reciprocal love between God and certain human beings. So, William Chittick is right to read in the second verse (and also in the first, I would argue) that from the Qur'ānic standpoint, love unconditional should be reserved only for God. Moreover, as Chittick explains, the Qur'ān argues that humans "should put their love into practice by following divine guidance" embodied in Muḥammad's practice and in so doing, they will come to find that God loves them too, and "will live in the presence of their true beloved."[162] With this verse then, the Qur'ān clearly affirms that there are a people whom God loves, namely those who themselves have an unconditional love for God, from which springs commitment to divine guidance in modeling themselves on the Prophet Muḥammad.

As Ayyub Palmer has observed, the Qur'ān does contain "the concept of a typology of believers who do have a special closeness to God."[163] One clear source for gradations within the Believers is the 56th chapter of the Qur'ān, which explains that humankind will fall into three categories on the day of judgment: the wicked, the righteous, and finally, "the foremost,…those drawn near [to God]" (56:9-10). While the righteous will consist of "many from the generations of old and many from those of latter-day generations" (56:49), the "foremost," who race to please God, will comprise "many from the generations of old, [but only] a few from latter-day generations" (56:10). This undoubtedly establishes a hierarchy within the believers, with the "foremost" drawn near to God being a progressively smaller, exclusive, few over time; further, these foremost who stand nearest to God are set over and above the category of believers

[162] William Chittick, *Divine Love: Islamic Literature and the Path to God* (Yale University Press, 2013), 10.
[163] Palmer, *Sainthood and Authority*, 7-8.

described (positively) as "righteous," who unlike the former, will exist in large numbers throughout time. Another verse distinguishes between surface-level faith as expressed in merely affirming a belonging to the community of believers, and that faith which is true and sincere, firmly entrenched in one's heart. The verse reads as follows:

> The Bedouins say, "we have attained to faith." Say [to them, O Muḥammad]: "You have not [yet] attained to faith; you should rather say, 'we have submitted,' for [true] faith has not yet entered your hearts." (Q 49:14).

According to the commentators,[164] this verse refers to a crop of recent Bedouin converts in Prophet Muḥammad's time who unwittingly exaggerated in their own appraisal of their faith: This verse affirms that one can very well be part of the Muslim community by public acknowledgement of "submission (*islām*)" to God (i.e., publicly becoming *muslim*); however, this does not necessarily entail having reached the ideal in faith; in so doing, the verse affirms degrees among the believers.

It is clear from the foregoing that the Qur'ān recognizes varying shades of profundity in commitment to, and intimacy with God, so that there must be a group of consummate individuals who should serve as models for the rest of humankind. It can thus be said that the *walī* of the post-Prophetic era, the human exemplar *par excellence*, grows out of reflections on how the Qur'ān presents divine intimacy with God, and that one should take caution not to suggest a categorical disjunction between the Qur'ānic notion of this intimacy, and its counterpart in post-Qur'ānic *wilāyah*. So concludes Ayyub Palmer, who writes, "What we see in the early sources are motifs and themes that

[164] See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, 22:314-316.

are picked up and reworked in the later tradition after having undergone transformations in meaning in the later tradition."[165]

However, to my mind, and as I hope to demonstrate, the transformations which these meanings undergo over time are so significant that the particular concept of *wilāyah* which becomes a matter of controversy between Sunnīs and the Muʿtazilah is more appropriately categorized as primarily a post-Qur'ānic phenomenon, even if it finds inspiration in the Qur'ān; as we've seen, references to a special subset of the believers who enjoy reciprocal intimacy with God are rare in the Qur'ān, and, while there are indications of a hierarchy for those close to God, this hierarchy becomes much more fleshed-out in post-Qur'ānic literature (as I show in the next chapter). It is in such literature that the substance of the *walī*, along with his function in society, is more fully developed. Moreover, there is little discussion in the Qur'ān on the purpose that God's intimates serve on earth, save that they are to serve as role models for other believers, and that they are in constant pursuit for the good as they work towards rectifying the earth. However, the functions of the *Awliyā'* in the post-Qur'ānic period far exceed the general purpose of supporting the good—they become for some, spiritual anchors of the earth for whose sake God sustains the very existence of the world.

3.2 On the Value of *Ḥadīth* Transmissions

In what follows, I cover the growth of historical traditions on the *Awliyā'* as presented in Sunnī *ḥadīth* literature from the latter part of the second/eighth century to the beginning of the fourth/tenth century, which takes us to the emergence of theological

[165] Palmer, *Saintly Authority*, 8. Palmer's reference to "early sources" on this point includes *ḥadīth* on *wilāyah* which while early, should be separated from the Qur'an, given the novelties in how *wilāyah* is treated in the *hadīth* literature, as I discuss below.

discussions on the authority of the *Awliyā'* and on their miracles (*karāmāt*) (the focus of the next two chapters). I focus on *ḥadīth* literature here for two reasons. First, the development of certain trends in proto-Sunni and Sunni Islamic thought is inextricably linked with the development of *ḥadīth* scholarship, so that one cannot speak of emerging views and topics of debate in early Sunnism without consulting the *ḥadīth* corpus. The term *sunnah*, which serves as the inspiration for the "Sunnī" appellation, may be translated as "normative practice" or "custom," and in Sunnī thought, refers ideally to precedent set by the Prophet, but is also applied to that of the earliest generations more broadly. From the end of the first Islamic century, there was widespread interest in reports (*ḥadīth*) of the sayings and deeds of the Prophet *and* other significant personalities in early Islam, a development accompanied by the increasing adoption of the concept of prophetic *sunnah*. This was a pervasive attitude which influenced virtually all the Sunnī disciplines so that reliance on oral-textual reports about early forebearers became integral to knowledge production. Soon, virtually all Sunnī schools understood *ḥadīth* as a source for delineating Islamic thought and practice, though they differed on which *ḥadīth* to accept, and the extent to which they were determining.[166] As such, one cannot understand the emergence of the *awliyā'* without appreciating the outsized role of oral traditions in the formation of Sunnī Islam. Secondly, I focus on traditions here

[166] See Jens Scheiner, "*Ḥadīth* and sunna," 79-97; John A. Nawas, "The Appellation 'Ṣāḥib Sunna' in Classical Islam: How Sunnism Came to Be," *Islamic Law and* Society 23 (2016): 1-22. For a discussion on an early creed which reflects the growing place of *sunnah* in early Islam, see Wilferd Madelung, "Early Sunnī Doctrine," 233-254; Pessagno, "The Murji'a, Īmān and Abū ʿUbayd," 382-394. Throughout this work, I take a non-committal stance on the "authenticity" question (e.g., did or did not the Prophet "actually" say what is alleged in a given *ḥadīth*?"). My interests lie in what the traditions suggest about intellectual trends at the time when they come into wide circulation (as far as we can tell). Further, while the traditional-religious literature tends to use different terms to demarcate a tradition of or about the Prophet (*ḥadīth*) from traditions about other personalities, especially after the first generation (*akhbār*; *āthār*), throughout, I use *ḥadīth* loosely as oral reports about the first generations, inclusive of that belonging to the Prophet and thereafter.

because *ḥadīth* on *wilāyah* from this period allow us to track, to a limited degree, the growth of this concept through the increasing currency of, and shifts in, traditions about the *Awliyā'*.

My arguments in this section will be based on the following three convictions surrounding *ḥadīth*, which I substantiate below: (1) *ḥadīth* compilers in the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries sought to genuinely transmit what they received from their sources; (2) we generally have more reason than not to trust the sources in their chains, at least up to the "Common Link," are genuinely reported; (3) it is sometimes possible to date certain traditions to the first/seventh century. First, I shall provide a few words on the phenomenon of the "Common Link". Let us consider for example that multiple chains of transmission exist for a given *ḥadīth*, and that these chains are presented in various *ḥadīth* compilations of the second/eighth-fifth/eleventh centuries. When one studies these chains, one comes to find that there is a transmitter common to all or most of them, from which the chains seem to branch out; this common transmitter is then identified as the "Common Link" (CL). For example, the various chains for a given *ḥadīth* might show the traditionist, Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (51/671-124/742) as primarily responsible for the wide dissemination of that *ḥadīth*, thus establishing him as the CL for the chains of that *ḥadīth* which spring from him.[167] Now, when the *ḥadīth* collector, ʿAbd Allāh Ibn al-Mubārak

[167] The term, "common link," though not without its antecedents in the emic *ḥadīth* tradition, was popularly conceptualized in western *ḥadīth* studies by the famed scholar, Joseph Schacht (d. 1969), who argued that the existence of a Common Link allows us to date a *ḥadīth* at least to the period of that Common Link (CL); he also argued that the earliest CLs belonged primarily to the first half of the second/eight century, and argued that the traditions they promulgated likely originated with them. Schacht was famously skeptical of the *isnad* (chain of transmission) as a true reflection of a tradition's transmission course, and argued that all figures that appear in the chain prior to the CL are not to be taken at face value; that is, he argued from an hermeneutic of suspicion that the Common Link is not to be assumed as genuine in the sources s/he provides for the *ḥadīth* in question, and instead, one should assume that the CL is the originator of the text until proven otherwise. See Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammad Jurisprudence*

(118-181/736-797), later reports that same *ḥadīth* from Maʿmar Ibn Rāshid (96/153-714/770), who in turn reports it from al-Zuhrī (51/671-124/742), who other chains in other works show as teaching various pupils, besides Maʿmar, the very same *ḥadīth*, then I assume that we have good reason to trust that ʿʿAbd Allāh Ibn al-Mubārak was sincere in preserving his inherited chain for this tradition. I then assume that the *ḥadīth* probably goes back to the apparent Common Link (al-Zuhrī), and further, that even al-Zuhrī has likely received the text from the source he mentions, unless there is reason to believe otherwise.

These convictions are founded on Harald Motzki's scholarship on early *ḥadīth* texts. First in a groundbreaking article and then in subsequent works,[168] Motzki applied his own "*isnād-cum-matn*" method of analysis to the "transmission structures" (that is, chains of transmission) in one *ḥadīth* compilation, the *Muṣannaf* of ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī (d. 211/826), active in the second/eighth century. His analysis led him to the conclusion that the author is generally to be trusted in what he attributes to his four main sources, and beyond this, that his reports can be reliably traced to the first Islamic

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(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950), 163, 170-176, and *passim*. Later, Juynboll (d. 2010) agreed with Schacht's thesis in the main, though he offered his own contributions. see G. H. A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of Early Ḥadīth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983), 206-217; G. H. A. Juynboll, "Some Isnād-Analytical Methods Illustrated on the Basis of Several Women-Demeaning Sayings from *Ḥadīth* Literature," *Al-Qanṭara*, 10 (1989): 343-384.

[168] Harald Motzki, "The Muṣannaf of ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī," 1-21. His thesis is recapitulated and further substantiated in Motzki, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh Before the Classical Schools* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), especially Chapters 2 and 3; and Motzki, "Dating Muslim Traditions: A Survey," *Arabica* 52, no. 2 (2005): 204-253. See also his collection of articles published in Motzki, *Analysing Muslim Traditions: Studies in Legal, Exegetical and Maghāzī Ḥadīth* (Leiden: Brill, 2010). While Motzki provided a number of incisive challenges to both Schacht and Juynboll, he did agree on the importance of the CL (where one can be identified) on dating *ḥadīth*. As opposed to his interlocutors however, Motzki concluded that we have reason to trust chains of transmission even into the 1st/7th century, as I discuss below. For his arguments against Schacht, Juynboll, and the skeptical school of Western *ḥadīth* studies which they represent, see Motzki, *Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence*, 18-26, 75-77, and *passim*; and "Dating Muslim Traditions," 210-223, 237ff. For a fuller discussion on recent trends in *ḥadīth* studies, including the impact of, and rejoinders to the *isnād-cum-matn* analysis and similar methods, see A. Kevin Reinhart, "Juynbolliana, Gradualism, the Big Bang, and *Ḥadīth* Study in the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 130, no. 3 (2010): 426-442.

century. His process and findings may be summarized as follows: Motzki combines a rigorous study of certain independent chains of transmission (*isnād*) in al-Ṣanʿānī's work with analysis of the materials (*matn*) that each tradition provides. This involves detailed analyses of al-Ṣanʿānī's immediate sources, then the sources throughout all levels of the chains, and the contents of the reports from these. He then observes several features in al-Ṣanʿānī's work that do not correspond with forgery. These include instances where one of al-Ṣanʿānī's sources (or the compiler himself) acknowledges uncertainty or includes an anonymous individual in the chain (for instance, a source will report from an unknown "man from so-and-so tribe," who himself reports from a known individual, then the chain pickups with names from there on). These, of course, are admitted defects in a science whose positive self-perception depends on a felt sense of strong epistemological methods centering on tracing knowledge through identified, reputable sources; so, it is not expected that a forger in *ḥadīth* would subject herself to this defect when she can simply bolster her chain by falsely inserting a name when called for. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, *ḥadīth* scholarship was a niche enterprise, and the success of a *ḥadīth* scholar relied upon other *ḥadīth* scholars' assessment of his credibility. As Motzki explains,

> The intention of the *isnād* system was to ensure reliability of the transmission process. The basic value linked with it was that I have to name the informant from whom I received the information…the whole scholarly community as a whole must have watched to ensure that this norm was not violated…If the scholarly *isnād* system was only to feign reliability, then the whole system of validating traditions by *isnāds* would have become absurd…Who had to be deceived? Other Muslim scholars? They must have been aware of the pointlessness and vanity of all the efforts to maintain high standards of transmission, if forgery of *isnāds* was part and parcel of the daily scholarly practice.[169]

[169] Harald Motzki, "Dating Muslim Tradition," 235.

For Motzki then, it seems more plausible that compilers, more than not, are truthful in naming their sources.

His analysis also reveals that the manner in which materials are distributed through the sources is inconsistent with forgery not just at the level of the compiler, but often with the transmitters themselves, given the complex, yet consistent transmission and attribution patterns which emerge upon close analysis. This is sustained by his statistical analyses of the reports attributed to these figures, which, he finds, tend to reveal a distinct profile for each personality in terms of the contents of her reports, the sources s/he mentions, and more. Given these results, Motzki finds that early *ḥadīth* texts can often provide us with traditions that trace to the first *hijrī* century; for example, one of al-Ṣanʿānī's main sources, Ibn Jurayj (d. 150/767), genuinely transmits from his teacher ʿAṭāʾ Ibn Abī Rabāḥ (d. 114/732). As a result, Motzki argues, Ibn Jurayj's reports from ʿAṭāʾ in the *Muṣannaf* can be dated to at least two to three decades before the end of the first/seventh century, given Ibn Abī Rabāḥ's date of death (114/732), for surely, his reports "did not spring from the void only at this time."[170]

Motzki's is an important intervention; accepting that CLs, like Ibn Abī Rabāḥ in the previous example, were not fabricators (à la the Schachtian assumption), but instead, genuine collectors and disseminators of oral traditions in their time, has important consequences for dating traditions. As Motzki explains, this would mean that the time of the CL is not the *terminus post quem* of the tradition in question, as assumed by Schacht and Juynboll, but instead, the *terminus ante quem*. Thus, following Motzki, I take it for

[170] Harald Motzki, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence*, 94. For Motzki's research on the Ibn Jurayj ← ʿAtā transmission, see Motzki, 77-95, 173-185, 234-238. Motzki has looked at other sample cases to argue for three reliable sources for 1st/7th century traditionist, al-Zuhrī. See Motzki, *Analysing Muslim Traditions*, Chapters 2-7.

granted that where a CL can be identified for a *ḥadīth*, then "we are entitled to assume that the common link received the tradition—*at least the gist of it*—from the individual(s) he gives as his informant(s) as long as indications are lacking to the contrary."[171]

With this mind, in what follows I will endeavor to show that reports on *wilāyah* in *ḥadīth* compilations from the second/eighth to the third/ninth centuries reflect the development of *wilāyah* from the end of the *first* Islamic century onward, when this can be identified by Motzki's approach. I make no other commitments beyond this to the *authenticity* of the *ḥadīth* reports discussed; by way of example, I leave aside the question of whether a *ḥadīth* in Ibn al-Mubārak's works which purports to quote the Prophet "actually" returns to the Prophet. Instead, my objective is to consider what these reports tell us about ideas circulating at the time of their recording, and based on Motzki's findings, in generations before. This is especially important for traditions in compilations of the second and third Islamic centuries that allow us to establish discourse on *wilāyah* in the first century and soon thereafter. As such, I adopt Motzi's method in dating traditions in such works but will set aside the task of analyzing chains of transmission for dating when referring to traditions that only appear in *ḥadīth* compilations after the third/ninth century. Importantly, this charitable approach to a compiler's chain does not preclude the susceptibility of this oral-textual tradition to mistakes, accretions, and interpolations on the part of the compiler or the transmitters, especially with the progression of time.[172] Indeed, as shown below, the reality of such alterations to traditions is often abundantly clear, and further, aids in our exploration of developments

[171] Motzki, "Dating Muslim Traditions," 240. Emphasis added.
[172] Motzki makes a similar caveat in acknowledging that his system "does not exclude the possibility that some traditions were revised, combined or even invented by the common links;" Motzki, "Dating Muslim Traditions," 228.

in the concept of *wilāyah*. Citing Motzki once again, I only start from a hermeneutic that assumes our compilers up to the CLs are genuine, "*as long as indications are lacking to the contrary*."[173]

3.3 The *Awliyā'* in *Ḥadīth*

3.3.1 Descriptions of the Awliyā' *in early* Ḥadīth *Compilations*

The earliest extant discourse on *Awliyā'* available to us appear in some of the earliest collections of *ḥadīth* emerging from the second to fourth Islamic centuries. These *ḥadīth* show the *Awliyā'* of God as an exclusive group who gain proximity to God, not by the mere fulfillment of ritual obligations, but rather by purity of character and the inner self, and by their service to creation. In what follows, we will proceed with a study of these early traditions, starting with the works of ʿAbd Allāh Ibn al-Mubārak (d. 181/797).[174] In analyzing how *ḥadīth* on *wilāyah* grow over the course of the second to fourth centuries, we will arrive at some conclusions on shifts in early traditionist conceptions of sainthood, and how this reflects the increasing dissemination of "knowledge" on the *Awliyā'*, no doubt coinciding with increasing acceptance of the concept.

In one *ḥadīth* in Ibn al-Mubārak's *Kitāb al-Zuhd* (a collection of traditions on *zuhd*, self-denial), the Companions of the Prophet ask him, "Who are the Friends

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[173] Motzki, "Dating Muslim Traditions," 240. Emphasis added.

[174] Among ʿAbd Allāh Ibn al-Mubārak's main sources are Maʿmar Ibn Rāshid (96/714-153/770), Sufyān al-Thawrī (95-161/714-777), Shuʿbah Ibn al-Hajjāj (82-160/701-776), and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Awzāʿī (88-157/707-773). Most of Ibn al-Mubārak's informants were active in the first half of the 2nd/8th century and were often themselves reporting from scholars active in the latter part of the first century; for example, Ibn al-Mubārak occasionally transmits from the aforementioned Maʿmar, who himself often transmits from the important Medinese scholar Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (51-671/124-742), among others. In turn, Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī is presented as transmitting from different scholars, and so on till we reach the alleged original source of the *ḥadīth*. For more on Ibn al-Mubārak's sources, see Feryal Salem, *The Emergence of Early Sūfī Piety and Sunnī Scholasticism: ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Mubārak* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 46-62.

(*Awliyā'*) of God," to which he responds, "those who when one sees them, one remembers God."[175] This pithy *ḥadīth* clearly suggests that the Prophet's audience knew of the *Awliyā'* as a distinct, yet *elusive* category of individuals about whom they sought further understanding. Here already, there is a subtle indication that these *Awliyā'* are not simply pious folk (for whom, the Companions would not need further clarification beyond the Qur'ān). The notion that God recognizes an especially cherished group among humankind whose presence inspire the remembrance of God seems quite early, particularly because there are other traditions which use the same description for others identified not expressly as *Awliyā'* but instead, as a special group of God's servants.[176] It is not surprising that the Muslim community would speak of differentiation among God's servants, and as we have seen, this is already prefigured in the Qur'ān. What is most interesting for us is that increasingly the vocabulary used to identify such individuals becomes more specific: as the aforementioned tradition foreshadows, they are slowly categorized as *Awliyā'*.

That the *Awliyā'* are those whose presence reminds one of God is further established in multiple traditions with slight variations, all of which seem connected to,

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[175] ʿAbd Allāh Ibn al-Mubarāk, provides two different chains for this tradition; See Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd wa-l-Raqā'iq*, ed. Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-Aʿẓamī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2004), nos. 217 and 218, p. 100. This also appears in Ibn Abī al-Dunyā (d. 281/894), *Kitāb al-Awliyā'*, ed. Muḥamamd al-Saʿīd Zaghlūl (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah, 1993), no. 15, p. 14; Abū Bakr al-Bazzār (d. 292/905), *Musnad al-Bazzār*, eds. Maḥfūẓ al-Raḥmān Zayn Allāh et al. (Medina, Saudi Arabia: Maktabat al-ʿUlūm wa al-Ḥikam, 1988-2009), no. 5034, 11:251; and Abū Bishr Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmad al-Dūlābī (d. 310/923), *Kitāb al-Kunā wa al-Asmā*', ed. Abū Qutaybah Naẓar Muḥammad al-Fāryābī (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2007), no. 574, 1:324. The bulk of these claim to return to Saʿīd Ibn Jubayr (d. 95/714), with an apparent common link being Misʿar Ibn Kidām (d. 155/772); accepting Misʿar as the CL, we may tentatively date the tradition to first half of the second Islamic century.

[176] *Kitab al-Zuhd*, no. 958, p. 287, and no. 1111, p. 322; the latter identifies these folk as servants of God who experience neither fear nor grief, a clear allusion to the *awliyā'* in Q 5:69. Cf. Abū Bakr ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad Ibn Abī Shaybah (d. 235/850), *Muṣannaf Ibn Abī Shaybah*, ed. Saʿd Ibn Nāṣir Ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Abū Ḥabīb al-Shathrī (Riyadh: Dār Kunūz Ishbīlyā li'n-Nashr wa al-Tawzīʿ, 2015), no. 37055, 19:262.

and inspired by earlier traditions. Often, they provide other descriptions of those near to God. For example, in his *Musnad*,[177] Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) narrates that the Prophet stated,

> "no servant attains genuine faith until he loves for God and hates for God; when he loves for God and hates for God, [only] then is he deserving of loyalty (*al-walā'*) with God. [God says:] 'Indeed, my Friends (*Awliyā'*) amid my servants, my Beloved from amongst creation, are remembered at my mention, and I am remembered at their mention."[178]

There is also the early association of this tradition with the *Awliyā'* mentioned in Q 10:62; that is, we find traditions which present early personalities as glossing the *Awliyā'* in that verse as those who inspire remembrance of God when others see them.[179] From such traditions, we can understand that early traditions on the *Awliyā'* conceived them as so consumed with remembrance of God that at their very sight or at their mention, others are reminded of the Divine.

Early collections also provide evidence of the developing conceptualization of the *Awliyā'* as somehow comparable to the prophets. Again, we can turn to Ibn al-Mubārak's

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[177] *Musnad ḥadīth* compilations are arranged according to the original narrator, so that the compiler groups all the traditions transmitted by one Companion, for example, together in one chapter. The earliest extant *musnad* is that of Abū Dawūd al-Ṭayālisi (d. 203/819). See Aisha Musa, "The Sunnification of *Ḥadīth* and the Ḥadīthification of *sunna*," in *The Sunna and its Status in Islamic Law: The Search for a Sound Ḥadīth*, ed. Adis Duderija (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 79-80.

[178] Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal* ed. Shuʿayb al-Arna'ūṭ, ʿĀdil Murshid, et al. (Damascus: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 2001), no. 15549, 24: 317; Ibn Ḥanbal also narrates this *ḥadīth* alternatively as "*the best of the servants of God* are those who when they are seen, God is remembered, and the worst of God's servants are those who go about slandering others, causing separation between loved ones, those who seek to cause harm to the righteous, Ibn Ḥanbal, 29: 521. The former *ḥadīth* also appears in the following: Abū Bakr Aḥmad al-Bazzār (d. 292/905), *Musnad al-Bazzār*, 11: 251; Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣbahānī (d. 430/1038), *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā' wa Ṭabaqāt al-Aṣfiyā'* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1974), 1:6, with nearly the same chain as in Ibn Ḥanbal. Similarly, Ibn Mājah (d. 273/887) has, the Prophet saying to his companions, "The best of you are those who when they are seen, God is remembered." Abū ʿAbd Allāh Aḥmad Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, ed. Shuʿayb al-Arna'ūṭ, et al. (Beirut: Dār al-Risālah al-ʿĀlamiyyah, 2009), no. 4119, 5:235-236.

[179] In one case, the Successor (that is, of the generation following the Companions), Saʿīd Ibn Jubayr comments on Q 10:62 as speaking of those the sight of whom gives rise to the remembrance of God (though transmitters state that he attributed this to the Prophet). In another case, Abū al-Ḍūḥā (101/720), an early traditionist, offers the same commentary. For the first, see Ibn Abī Shaybah, *Muṣannaf*, no. 38014, 19:556; for the second, Ibn Abī al-Shaybah, no. 37055, 19:262.

al-Zuhd as the earliest extant source for this view. The relevant tradition may be summarized as follows:

> the Companion Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī reports that at one point, the Prophet, surrounded by a gathering of His Companions, spoke of an elect group of God's servants whose rank with God is so profoundly inestimable that they command the envy of the prophets and the martyrs; by virtue of their proximity to God, they will take their seat close to Him on the Day of Judgment. Upon hearing this, a Bedouin in their midst eagerly asks that the Prophet explain who these could be; inspired by the Bedouin's enthusiasm, the Prophet explains that these figures are not limited to any particular tribe but rather emerge from a mixture of peoples and unrelated tribes (*nās min afnā' al-nās wa nawāziʿ al-qabā'il*). He proceeds to explain that God will place them upon pillars of light on the Day of Judgment and will make even their faces light. The prophet concludes with stating that while others will be filled with dread on the Day of Judgment, these individuals will be free of dread, for "*they are the* Awliyā' *of God, no fear will come upon them, nor will they grieve*" (citing of course, Q 10:62).

Of extant second/eighth and third/ninth century compilations, in addition to Ibn al-Mubārak's *al-Zuhd*, this tradition is also reported by ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī and Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal.[180] Upon analysis of the transmission chains in these works, it becomes clear that the figure most responsible for the wide dissemination of the tradition is a certain Shahr Ibn Khawshab (d. ca. 100/719),[181] so that again following Motzki, we might trace the *ḥadīth* as existing by the end of the first century with some confidence. Here again we find an affirmation of a group of individuals who, if the *ḥadīth* is taken at face value, rival the prophets (and the martyrs) in their proximity to God. The *ḥadīth* also

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[180] ʿAbd Allāh Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, no. 714, p. 224-225; ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī, *al-Muṣannaf*, ed. Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-Aʿẓamī (Johannesburg: South Africa: Dār al-Majlis al-ʿIlmī, 1970), no. 20324, 11:201-202; Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, no. 22906, 37:540-541.

[181] The chain for the first is as follows; Ibn al-Mubārak ← ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Ibn Bahrām ← **Shahr Ibn Khawshab** ← ʿAbd Al-Raḥmān Ibn Ghanam ← Abū Mālik al-Ashʿarī. For the second: al-Ṣanʿānī ← Maʿmar ← Ibn Abī Ḥusayn ← **Shahr Ibn Khawshab** ← Abū Mālik al-Ashʿarī. Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal also reports his version with virtually the same chain as in Ibn al-Mubārak, except that his link to ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd is through another immediate source. The version in Ibn al-Mubārak as well as that in Aḥmad identify the elect as the *awliyā'*, while al-Ṣanʿānī's has them as "[special] servants from the servants of God]." Curiously, Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal reports a shorter version of the same *ḥadīth* directly from al-Ṣanʿānī, with the exact chain mentioned above, and here, also has "servants from the servants of God," contrasting his other narration. Arguably, this again is a sign of sincerity in transmitting what he receives. For his second chain, see Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 22894, 37:530.

resists an ethnocentric conception of the *Awliyā'*, explaining that they are not to be sought in any one place or people exclusively. However, there is as of yet, not much information about how the *Awliyā'* function in this world. We might say that the tradition implies the audience ought to understand what characterizes them: they are those who have a desire for proximity to God, and who pursue this through piety and cultivation of moral character. In other words, the purpose of the tradition is to inspire the audience to seek the moral ideal, to seek a place among the *Awliyā'*, rather than to instruct commonfolk to value and honor the *Awliyā'*, from which they are removed.

In early *ḥadīth* works, we also find a tradition which speaks to the union between God and His Beloved, and which became an important prooftext in Sunnī *wilāyah* discourse. For reasons that will soon become clear, I will refer to this tradition as the *Ḥadīth* of Union. In this tradition, the Prophet quotes God directly as declaring a close union between Himself and His Friends, right alongside declaring enmity against those who would pester or cause harm (the Arabic allows for both emotional and physical offense) to these Friends. In many variants, this comes in the context of a discussion on how one draws nearer unto God beyond discharging religious obligations, through the performance of supererogatory acts (*nawāfil*). In the earliest extant record of this *ḥadīth*, Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal narrates that the Prophet's wife ʿĀ'ishah, attributes to the Prophet the following:

> God says, whoever harms a Friend (*walī*) of mine, then s/he has made My warring with him licit. My believing servant does not draw nearer to Me with anything as s/he does through fulfilling obligatory acts, and My servant continues to draw nearer to Me through supererogatory acts until I love her. When s/he asks of Me, I give, and when s/he supplicates to Me, I respond. When s/he calls on Me, I answer, and when s/he asks of Me, I give. I do not hesitate in undertaking any of

> My actions as I do in [causing] her death, because s/he is not pleased with death, and I detest causing her grief.[182]

This *ḥadīth* was widely transmitted by early traditionists and went on to become one of the most cited texts in establishing the privilege of the *walī*.[183] In most versions of the *ḥadīth* after Ibn Ḥanbal, God speaks of acting through the limbs of this servant. For example, in the version provided by Ibn Abī al-Dunyā (d. 281/894),[184] after explaining how the servant reaches a point when God comes to love him, the text continues, "and when I love him, I become the eyes with which s/he sees, the hand with which s/he grasps, the legs with which s/he walks, the heart with which s/he reasons, and the tongue with which s/he speaks."[185] Analysis of the chains provided by Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, and al-Bazzār reveals a likely common link in ʿAbd al-Wāḥid Ibn Maymūn, himself a client (*mawlā*) of the Successor, ʿUrwah Ibn Zubair (d. 94/714), from whom ʿAbd al-Wāḥid claims to narrate the tradition. Given the resoundingly negative

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[182] Aḥmād Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad Aḥmad*, 26193, 43:261. This *ḥadīth* is widely transmitted in compilations of the second/eighth-third/ninth centuries; e.g., Abū Bakr Aḥmad al-Bazzār (d. 292/905), *Musnad al-Bazzār*, no. 99, 18:137; Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-Awliyā'*, no. 45, 23. Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir al-Uṣūl fī Aḥādīth al-Rasūl*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ʿUmayra (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1992) 2:232. All versions cited excepting Ibn Ḥanbal's include the notion that God somehow unites with the person of His beloved servant. The version in al-Tirmidhī's work varies slightly with, "the believing servant does not worship me with anything like [i.e., more pleasing than] self-denial (*zuhd*) in this world." The CL here would seem to be ʿAbd al-Wāḥid Ibn Maymūn, the Mawlā of ʿUrwa Ibn Zubair. The *ḥadīth* tradition is critical of ʿAbd al-Wāhid, so that we have little reason to trust that the tradition actually goes back to ʿUrwa. That said, we may date the tradition to the time of ʿAbd al-Wāḥid. Shortly predating Aḥmad's report is a tradition in which the early scholar Ḥasan Ibn ʿAṭiyyah (d. 211/826) himself (and not the Prophet) instructs that "whoever shows enmity to the *awliyā'* of God, then God announces war with him;" Ibn Abī Shaybah, *Muṣannaf*, no. 38219, 20:40.

[183] The *ḥadīth* is identified in the traditional discourse as the *ḥadīth al-Nawāfil* (on Supererogatory Acts) because of the value given to supererogatory acts in the tradition. On the legacy of this *ḥadīth* in mature Islamic spirituality between the 3rd-7th/9th-13th centuries, see Michael Ebstein, "The Organs of God: *Hadīth al-Nawāfil* in Classical Islamic Mysticism," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 138, no. 2 (2018): 271-289.

[184] On whom and on his teachings, see A. Dietrich, "Ibn Abī 'l-Dunyā," *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* 2nd Edition (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 3:684; Leonard Librande, "Ibn Abī al-Dunyā [d. 281/894]: Certainty and Morality," *Studia Islamica* 100, no. 01 (2005): 5-42; and, A. J. Arberry, "Ibn Abī'l-Dunyā on Penitence," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 1, no. 2 (1951): 48-63. For a translation of one of his works, see Leah Kinberg, *Morality in the Guise of Dreams: A Critical Edition of* Kitāb al-Manām, (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

[185] Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-Awliyā'*, 23.

assessment of early *ḥadīth* critics on ʿAbd al-Wāḥid as a transmitter, [186] we may safely take him as largely responsible for the wide dissemination of this tradition, so that it exists at least by his time.[187] As such, again, we may place the attitudes conveyed in the tradition squarely within the end of the first Islamic century.

From the *Ḥadīth* of Union, we can derive at least three early teachings on the *walī*: 1.) The inviolability of the *walī* must not be transgressed 2.) the *walī* has an unparalleled privilege in God's desire to please him, and 3.) the relationship between God and the *walī* is so profoundly intimate that it may be depicted in monistic terms. The God-*walī* connection materializes in God taking hold of the Friend's very person, becoming the "eyes with which s/he sees," and so on. Such language gives way to perceiving the *walī* as the Complete Human, the consummate servant of God, for God lies behind, or rather *within* her every action. Because of this, the Friend of God earns a sort of sanctity so that to invoke the ire of the *walī* is to do the same with God—it is to declare war with God. Thus, in one of Ibn Abī al-Dunyā's versions of this *ḥadīth*, the portion relevant to this inviolability adds, "Whoever humiliates a Friend of mine, then

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[186] The *ḥadīth* critic Ibn ʿAdī al-Jurjānī (d. 365/976) not only rejects him as unreliable in *ḥadīth* generally, but also mentions him as falsely attributing traditions to ʿĀ'ishah, through ʿUrwah (who happens to be nephew to the former), and specifically mentions our particular *ḥadīth* in question by way of example. Al-Jurjānī, *al-Kāmil fī Ḍuʿafā' al-Rijāl*, ed. ʿĀdil Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Mawjūd and ʿAlī Muḥammad Muʿawwaḍ (Beirut: al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1997), no. 1444, 6:524. See also the assessments in Ibn Ḥibbān, *Kitāb al-Majrūḥīn*, ed. Ḥamdī ʿAbd al-Majīd al-Salafī (Riyadh: Dār al-Ṣamīʿī li-n-Nashr wa al-Tawzīʿ, 2000), no. 768, 2:140; and Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Nasā'ī, *al-Ḍuʿfā' wa al-Matrūkūn*, ed. Maḥmūd Ibrāhīm Zāyid (Aleppo, Syria: Dār al-Waʿī, 1976), no. 369, p. 68.

[187] There is a parallel tradition with a different chain provided in al-Bukḥarī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*; see Muḥammad Ibn Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Cairo, Egypt: al-Sulṭāniyya, 1422[/2001]), no. 6502, 8:105. This is an isolated chain, which claims to return not to ʿĀ'ishah, but rather, to the Companion, Abū Hurayrah (who in turn, quotes the Prophet). Likewise, Ibn Mājah has a different tradition which also mentions God warring with one who antagonizes a Friend: "*...indeed, whoever shows enmity to a Friend of God* has declared war on God. Indeed, God loves the righteous, the reverent, the recluse, those who when they are absent, no one misses them, and when they are present, no one calls for them, (for) they are unknown; (but) their hearts are lamps of guidance, they are freed of any calamity." Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, no. 3989, 5:126. The tradition allegedly returns to the Companion, Muʿādh Ibn Jabal.

s/he has prepared to war with me in the battlefield."[188] Likewise, in another variant, the Prophet attributes to God Himself, "Know that whoever causes a Friend of mine to fear, then s/he has come to the battlefield to war with me, and I shall avenge them on the Day of Judgment."[189] We also find a variant of the tradition recorded by the mystic and traditionist, al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 298/910), with God declaring, "I am most swift in aiding my Friends, and I become angry on their behalf with the anger of an enraged lion."[190] No doubt, such statements would have served to inspire awe for the *Awliyā'* (so far as they could be identified), and fear and caution in contravening them.

Beyond promising divine vengeance on behalf of the Friend of God, the *Hadīth* of Union also speaks to two important privileges for the *walī*: a promise of answered prayers, and more broadly, God's desire to satisfy this Friend's wishes, to the extent that God hesitates to cause his death at the appointed time. Answered prayers for God's special elect is corroborated in various other traditions, which reflect Muslim elaborations of this favor over the course of the first centuries. For example, one tradition, reports the Prophet as stating, "Verily, from the servants of God are those who, whenever they swear [by God], God fulfills their oath."[191] The commonalities in the various chains for the tradition suggest that its circulation owes to the activity of one Ḥumaid al-Ṭawīl (d.

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[188] Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-Awliyā*, 9.

[189] Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-Awliyā*, 47. This long *ḥadīth* speaks on the qualities of the *awliyā'*, highlighting their humility and the life of poverty which God has imposed upon them, keeping them from the pleasures of this world for their own benefit, "just as the compassionate shepherd wards his cattle from the resting place of mangy camels." This also appears in another *ḥadīth* collection belonging to Aḥmad, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, which quotes God enjoining Moses and Aaron to confront the Pharaoh; in encouraging the two brothers, God reminds them not to pay heed to Pharoah's largesse in comparison to their own weakness, for it is God's custom to beset his Friends with poverty and protect them from the pleasures of this word (in accordance with the *ḥadīth* in Ibn Abī al-Dunyā). See Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Salām Shāhīn (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1999), no. 342, p. 54.

[190] Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir al-Uṣūl*, 2: 232, 2: 234.

[191] The tradition appears in the following compilations, among others: Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, no. 12302, p. 19:314; Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-Awliyā'*, no. 44, p. 23; al-Bukharī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 4500, p. 6:24; Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, no. 2649, 3:664.

143/760),[192] so that we can we can credit his period with this elaboration on the *walī*'s privilege with God. Another tradition, which begins to be recorded in the late third/ninth century with Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, also speaks of God's special *ḍanā'in*, that is, dear friends which one holds on to firmly, jealously, unwilling to relinquish them.[193] The tradition seems to emerge, or is at least placed into wider circulation, in the second/eighth century, through the activity of one Ismāʿil Ibn ʿIyash (d. 182/798).[194] Such friends, we are told, God covers in His mercy, so that they live in a state of spiritual equanimity till death comes upon them, at which point God calls them to His company in paradise. On the privileges of these *ḍanā'in*, later traditions explain that God protects them from (premature) death and disease, that He elongates their life, ensures good provisions for them, and that He takes their life while they are reclined on their beds (i.e., grants them ease in death).[195]

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[192] There are two popular transmissions for this tradition, but the more likely source seems to be that converging on Ḥumaid al-Ṭawīl (d. 143/760). Ḥumaid appears in the cited traditions in Ibn Ḥanbal, Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, Ibn Mājah, and al-Bukhārī (see the next preceding fn. for references). For the other variant, see Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* no. 14028, p. 21:425-426; see also the editor's comments on this *ḥadīth* for an argument on why Ḥumaid is the more likely source.

[193] Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitab al-Awliyā*, 9-10; traditions on the *ḍanā'in* appear in later compilations as well, e.g, Abū al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī (d. 360/971), *al-Muʿjam al-Awsaṭ,* ed. Abū Muʿādh Ṭāriq Ibn ʿIwaḍ Allah Ibn Muḥammad, et al. (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥaramain, 1995) no. 6369, 6:265; Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣbahānī (d. 430/2038), *Ḥilyat al-Awliya',* 1:6.

[194] Ismāʿil Ibn ʿIyāsh (d. 182/798) is the clear CL in the chains for Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, al-Ṭabarānī, and Abū Nuʿaym, from an unknown Muslim Ibn ʿAbd Allah al-Ḥimṣī. On Muslim's unknown status, see Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿUqaylī (d. 322/933) *Kitāb al-Ḍuʿafā' al-Kabīr*, ed. ʿAbd al-Muʿṭī Amīn Qalʿajī (Beirut: Dār al-Maktabat al-Ilmiyyah, 1984), no. 1720, 4: 152-153. Al-ʿUqaylī mentions the *ḥadīth* in question, and states that Muslim is virtually unknown, so that *ḥadīh* attributed to him with this chain is not to be trusted as returning to its alleged source. See also a similar assessment in Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348), *Mīzān al-Iʿtdāl fī Naqd al-Rijāl*, ed. ʿAlī Muḥamamd al-Bijāwī (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa li'ṭ-Ṭabāʿah wa al-Nashr, 1963), no. 8494, 4:105.

[195] That these traditions likely emerge after the second/eighth century is indicated by their late appearance; they do not appear in extant works until the late third/ninth century with Ibn Abī al-Dunyā; see Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-Awliyā*, 10. They find wider circulation after, e.g., Abū al-Qasīm al-Ṭabarānī (d. 360/971), *al-Muʿjam al-Kabīr*, ed. Ḥamdī Ibn ʿAbd al-Majīd al-Salafī (Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymiyyah, 1994), no. 10371, p. 10:176; Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī (d. 384/994), *Shuʿab al-Īmān* (Branches of Faith), ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Maktabat al-Rushd wa al-Tawzīʿ, 2003), no. 9669, p. 12:418. For what it's worth, traditional *ḥadīth* critics are almost unanimous in rejecting this particular tradition. See the editor's comments to the tradition in al-Bayhaqī's work.

Given the foregoing discussion, it seems clear before the turn of the second/eighth century, the concept of a privileged group of believers called the *Awliyā'* was already in development. Such early reflections on *wilāyah* are most discernable in *ḥadīth* compilations of the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries, particularly those of Ibn al-Mubārak, ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī, Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, and Ibn Abī al-Dunyā. Within that short period and thereafter, the traditions show continuous expansion on *wilāyah*. Where in Ibn al-Mubārak's work, the *Awliyā'* are distinguished primarily by fervent remembrance of and devotion to God for which they earn proximity to God in their next life, in the works of our third/ninth century authors (Ibn Ḥanbal, Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, etc.) they have become, by virtue of this love for God, associated with divine protection and accepted prayers in the here and now. So desirous is God to please them that God hesitates to cause them death, but when He does, He assures them a comfortable exit from this world. Their proximity to God is now expressed in terms of identification so that God now acts through these persons, and moreover, the Friends have become so inviolable that God threatens those who would provoke them with danger in this world and the next.

3.3.2 Stakes and Substitutes: A Study of the **Abdāl** *Tradition*

Alongside developing the privileges of the *Awliyā'*, *ḥadīth* in this period also begin to elaborate on distinctions *within* the *Awliyā'*, establishing an elite within the elite through whom the world is sustained. In his *ḥadīth* compilation treating Jihad, aptly titled *Kitāb al-Jihād*, ʿAbd Allāh Ibn al-Mubārak transmits a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet declares, "There will never cease to be seven in my nation, [who are such that] never do they call on God for something except that He grants them [what they ask]; by them, you

receive (divine) aid, and by them you receive rain." According to our author, his source for this *ḥadīth* adds, "I believe he also said, 'and through them you are protected.'"[196] From this we find the introduction of a small group of God's intimates, here numbered at seven, for the sake of whom God ensures the wellbeing of the believers. This sentiment is echoed and expanded upon in collections that appear within a few decades of Ibn al-Mubārak. In time, these elite, variously numbered few are identified with different titles to suggest the indispensable nature of their presence on earth. Though the traditions differ on their number, they will become a group through whom, or on whose behalf, God favors the believers in this world. Per several *ḥadīth*, these figures are so essential that God establishes them as a cosmic institution of "substitutes" (*abdāl*), for throughout time, whenever one passes, God puts in his place (*abdala*) another, such that their number is always complete.

Curiously, the *abdāl* tradition seems to have originated as part of Pro-Syrian propaganda in relation to early Syrian-Iraq tensions during the first Muslim Civil War, with no connotations of sainthood in the earliest reports. It is only gradually that the *abdāl* become exclusively identified with an elite group of saints who stand as a source of divine aid and protection on earth. The *abdāl* begin in the *ḥadīth* tradition as a shadowy group of individuals on the wrong side between two warring factions of Muslims after the Prophet's death: one camp belonging to Muʿāwiyah (d. 60/680) in Syria (with the *abdāl* among his numbers), as against the camp belonging to ʿAlī (d. 40/661) in Irāq. The scene refers to one of the most spiritually devastating armed conflicts in the First Muslim Civil

[196] Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitab al-Jihād*, ed. Nazīḥ Ḥammād (Jeddah, Saudi Arabia: Dār al-Maṭbūʿāt al-Ḥadīthiyya, 2009), no. 195, p. 172.

War (656-661).[197] Again, in ʿAbd Allāh Ibn al-Mubārak's *Kitāb al-Jihād*, our earliest source on the *abdāl*—they are unambiguously, and exclusively associated with this historical event. In that work, the *abdāl* are mentioned in a tradition that takes us to the peak of this conflict, the Battle of Ṣiffīn. At some point on "the Day of Siffīn," one of ʿAlī's men (the Iraqi faction) states with fervor, "O God, curse the people of Syria!" At this, ʿAlī responds, "do not disparage the people of Syria altogether, for among them are a group who despise what you see (i.e., the alleged injustice of the Syrian leaders), and among them are the *abdāl*."[198] Though it cannot be stated conclusively that the *abdāl* and those who sympathize with ʿAlī are one and the same in this tradition,[199] the tradition surely suggests a connection between the two by mentioning them together. No matter the case, in this *ḥadīth*, the presence of the *abdāl* in the land of Syria during the Battle of Ṣiffīn is central to ʿAlī's repudiation of categorically vilifying the people of Syria.

This is the only material we have on the *abdāl* in Ibn al-Mubārak's works so that we cannot but conclude that for the earliest transmitters, the *abdāl* are primarily, if not exclusively, associated with the historical context of the Battle of Ṣiffīn. What is more,

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[197] The Civil War itself has historically been a source of consternation for Muslims–that such trauma should befall the Muslim community within 30 years of the Prophet's death raised questions about the assumed moral superiority of this early generation. The legacies of these conflicts were central to the earliest theological divisions that would arise in Islam, particularly the Sunnis and the Shīʿah. The most significant study of the Civil War and its antecedents is found in Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muḥammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). For an excellent critical study of the historical sources on the civil war and on its legacies (including in Islamic historiography), see Erling L. Peterson, *Alī and Muʿāwiya in Early Arabic Tradition: Studies on the Genesis and Growth of Islamic Historical Writing until the End of the Ninth Century* (Copenhagen: Munksgard, 1964). For a brief discussion on the first Civil War, see G. R. Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam: The Umayyad Caliphate AD 661-750*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 24-33. See also Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Centuries*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016), 60-72.

[198] Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Jihād*, 1:152; Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Faḍā'il al-Ṣaḥaāba*, ed. Waṣī Allāh Muḥammad ʿAbbās (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1983), no. 1726, 2:905

[199] When ʿAlī says "among them are a group who despise what you see, and among them are the *abdāl*," the intended antecedent for the second "them" is ambiguous; this could refer either to "the people of Syria" or to those who disapprove of the conflict.

there is no mention here of the *abdāl* as vehicles of God's favor for the believers, as we find later, nor are they limited to a certain number in this tradition. Instead, the most that can be said about the *abdāl* from this *ḥadīth* is that they are righteous people of the highest order, individuals presumably on the side of truth, who find themselves inadvertently among wrongdoers in Syria. Suggestively, Ibn al-Mubārak places this tradition alongside a number of others which do not speak of the *abdāl*, but nevertheless, allude to the ʿAli-Muʿāwiyah conflicts, and which are either explicitly pro-Syrian, or at least, discourage maligning the people of Syria in a blanket fashion.[200] This contextual framing leaves us with the impression that the function of the *ḥadīth* in this work is to enumerate the merits of Syria, among which is the presence of the *abdāl* therein.

There is the matter of why ʿAlī recognizes these figures as *abdāl*; linguistically, the singular noun, *badal*, connotes "change," alongside "substitute" and "replacement," in the sense of something that has taken the place of another, literally or metaphorically. The etymologically related transitive verb *abdala* translates to, "he replaced [something] *with* something else," or alternatively, "he put [something] in the place of another."[201] In her analysis of this tradition, Mikati argues that for the earliest transmitters, the term was a "reference to a Pro-ʿAli group of Syrian dissenters and defectors who thereby acquired

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[200] E.g., a *ḥadīth* wherein the Prophet foresees the conflicts that will postdate him, stating to one of his companions, "Indeed, you will be recruited by various armies, one in Syria, one in Iraq, and one in Yemen…stick to Syria…for God has safeguarded Syria and its people for me." Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Jihād*, 15; Al-Ṣanʿānī, *Muṣṣanaf*, no. 20456, 11:250. In another *ḥādīth*, the Prophet states, "there will come a time when no believer will remain but that s/he has clung to Syria;" Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Jihād*, 152. Such traditions are already in wide circulation by this period; ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī, for example, reports four explicitly pro-Syrian *ḥadīth*, including the two aforementioned traditions. See ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī, *Muṣannaf*, 11:249-251. See also, Abū Bakr Ibn Abī al-Shaybah (d. 235/849), *Muṣannaf Ibn Abī al-Shaybah*, 4:217.

[201] Thus Q 68:32; after God has destroyed the gardens of certain wealthy landowners who refuse to give of their harvest in charity, they say repentantly, "It may be that our Lord will give us in exchange (*yubdil*) something better than it [i.e., their destroyed gardens]." See also the for *b-d-l* in Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1863), 1:167-168.

the moniker *abdāl* or 'substitutes' with the sense of 'changing' sides or allegiance."[202] Mikati's formidable argument notwithstanding, it seems safer to assume that the traditions emerged as part of a campaign to advocate for, or vindicate the honor of Syrian Muslims, either to counter the plethora of pro-Iraqi traditions that had already begun to circulate, or to avoid categorical vilification of one faction of Muslims who had companions of the Prophet in their midst, and to thereby assuage anxieties about conflict in the early Muslim community.[203]

This function is brought to the fore in how the *abdāl* figures in the *Muṣannaf* of ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī (d. 211/826). Like Ibn al-Mubārak, al-Ṣanʿānī transmits ʿAlī's *ḥadīth* of the *abdāl*, with the only adjustment here being that ʿAlī is said to have emphasized the presence of the *abdāl* in Syria thrice.[204] After presenting his own version of the *ḥadīth*, al-Ṣanʿānī then reports various *ḥadīth* on Iraq, none of which figure Iraq positively, but instead, speak of negative omens for the land. In one tradition, a companion claims Iraq is where Satan stepped foot;[205] in another tradition, we are told that ʿUmar, the second caliph of Islam, once intended to settle in Iraq, until another companion, Kaʿb, told him, "Don't do it! For therein is the Dajjāl, therein are the most powerful of the jinn, therein lies nine-tenths of sorcery, and therein lies every dreadful

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[202] Rana Mikati, "The Identity of the Syrian *abdāl*," *Bulletin of SOAS* 80, no. 1 (2017): 27.
[203] Such motivations have a well-known presence in early *ḥadīth* collections; See Zaman's comments on Ibn Abī Shaybah's (d. 235/849) discussion on the Battle of Siffīn; Muhammad Qasim Zaman, "Maghazi and the Muhaditthun: Reconsidering the Treatment of 'Historical' Materials in Early Collections of Ḥadīth," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28, no. 1 (1996): 12. See also Zayde Antrim, "Ibn ʿAsākir's Representations of Syria and Damascus in the Introduction to the *Ta'rīkh Madinat Dimashq,*" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38, no. 1 (2006): 111-117; for the "Do not curse the people of Syria" tradition, see especially Antrim, 114. Antrim concludes that ʿAlī's defense of Syria serves to exonerate the region and its people from the atrocities of Ṣiffīn.
[204] Al-Ṣanʿānī, *Muṣannaf*, no. 20407, 11:249; see also Mikati's brief discussion on the analysis of this *hadīth* in Mikati, "The Syrian Abdāl," 29.
[205] al-Ṣanʿānī, *Muṣannaf*, no. 20460, 11:251.

disease."[206] It is no coincidence that these *ḥadīth* on Iraq appear directly after those on Syria; this text is written in the genre of the *Muṣannaf*—works arranged topically. Al-Ṣanʿānī has thus intentionally grouped together these traditions which cover the demerits of Irāq in order to juxtapose them with, and thereby, highlight the merits of Syria mentioned in his preceding section.[207] So, while al-Ṣanʿānī only presents the one *ḥadīth* on the *abdāl*, its placement around *ḥadīth* on Syria demonstrates clear associations in the minds of the earliest transmitters and compilers between the *abdāl*, the Battle of Ṣiffīn, and Syria. Importantly, neither ʿAbd Allāh Ibn al-Mubārak's tradition on *abdāl* nor that of ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī refer to theurgical functions for the *abdāl*, or to the notion that they exist in perpetuity, with each newly appointed *badal* "substituting" a predecessor, as later traditions mention. In these early contexts, the *abdāl* were merely figured as righteous individuals in the wrong place during the Battle of Ṣiffīn.

3.3.3 Becoming Saints: The Decontextualization of the Abdāl

For the *abdāl* to become the patron saints we find later in the Sunnī tradition, the *abdāl* narrative would first have to be detached from the historical context found in its earliest version, a process already underway by the time of ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī (d. 126/744-211/827). As aforementioned, this scholar reports the earlier *ḥadīth* of ʿAlī wherein the *abdāl* are not associated with theurgical power.[208] Yet, as Rana Mikati observes, while in ʿAbd Allāh Ibn al-Mubārak's version, ʿAlī explicitly mentions the presence of those who disapprove of the conflict in Syria as a reason for rejecting

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[206] al-Ṣanʿānī, *Muṣannaf*, no. 20461, 11: 251. *Al-Masīḥ al-Dajjāl* (The False Messiah), an eschatological figure, is a parallel to the Christian Antichrist which appears in extra-Qur'anic literature. See A. Abel, "Al-Dad̲j̲d̲j̲āl," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 2:76-77.

[207] E.g., the aforementioned *ḥadīth* (fn. 200) wherein the Prophet predicts the Muslim community splitting into three armies (with bases in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, respectively), and warns his companions to support the Syrians; Al-Ṣanʿānī, *Muṣṣanaf*, no. 20456, 11:250.

[208] al-Ṣanʿānī, *Muṣannaf*, no. 20455, 11:249.

calumny against the Syrians, in one of the traditions provided by al-Ṣanʿānī, ʿAlī's rejection of disparaging the Syrians is based purely in the *abdāl* being in their midst, with no mention of where the *abdāl* stand on the conflict.[209] In other words, the presence of those who are displeased with the war plays no role in detailing the merits of Syria in the second version. Rather, Syria's merits, and the reason why it should be protected from insult, lie exclusively in the presence of the *abdāl* in that land. Whereas the previous *ḥadīth* suggests a connection between the *abdāl* and supporters of justice (in the context of the Civil War), in the second, the *ḥadīth* suggests that Syria's inviolability is based solely in the inviolability of the *abdāl* qua their being *abdāl*.[210] It is worth noting that for their *abdāl* traditions, Ibn al-Mubārak and ʿAbd al-Razzāq both have Maʿmar (d. 153/770) as their source, who in turn, narrates from al-Zuhri (d. 124).[211] We thus have good reason to think that the association between the *abdāl* and the events at Siffīn go back at least to al-Zuhri's time.[212] Yet, between Ibn al-Mubārak and al-Ṣanʿānī, there is

[209] Mikati, "The Syrian *abdāl*," 29.
[210] For further insights on how the two transmission chains compare, see Mikati, "The Syrian *abdāl*," 29. Mikati correctly observes the important historical implications of the exclusive emphasis on the *abdāl* in this *ḥadīth*. However, she is incorrect in stating that unlike in the earlier *ḥadīth*, the "locus of the event" is no longer the Battle of Ṣiffīn in the second. Rather, in both, the alleged witness of the incident explicitly states that on the "Day of Ṣiffīn," some unnamed individual called for the cursing of the People of Syria. See Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitab al-Jihād*, 1:152; ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī, *Muṣannaf*, no. 20455, 11:249.
[211] It is after al-Zuhrī that the chains slightly diverge; Ibn al-Mubārak narrates from Ṣafwān Ibn ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Safwān (that is, Ṣafwān, the son of ʿAbd Allāh, the son of Ṣafwān), while in ʿAbd al-Razzāq's chain, al-Zuhrī narrates from ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Ṣafwān, that is, Ṣafwan's father, himself a contemporary of ʿAlī's, and thus a more direct and "reliable" source. Mikati considers this a case of "back growth" in ʿAbd al-Razzāq's work. Mikati is drawing on the widely accepted view in *ḥadīth* studies, popularized by Joseph Schacht, that chains of transmission had a tendency to grow backwards over time such that traditions originally from Successors of the companions were later projected onto the companions, while traditions from the Companions were projected onto the Prophet. See Joseph Schacht, *Origins of Muḥammadan Jurisprudence*, 165. For a summary of this view, its implications, and how it has been problematized, see, see Daniel Brown, "Western Ḥadīth Studies," 45-47.
[212] As Motzki has argued, we can derive al-Zuhrī's teachings by studying the chains in the 2nd/8th century *ḥadīth* compilations, especially those of Abd al-Razzāq and Ibn al-Mubārak. See Motzki, *Analysing Muslim Traditions*, 1-46; for Maʿmar as a source of al-Zuhrī's teaching, see especially 4-11.

this adjustment which, though seemingly minor, suggests a development in the theology served by the tradition.

Further, while in al-Ṣanʿānī's work, the *abdāl*-Syria connection continues, his arrangement also reveals increased allusions to the *abdāl* as characterized by saintly patronage of the believers; in a *ḥadīth* included in his brief section on Syria, we find the *ḥadīth* with which we began this section, that which speaks of the enigmatic Seven through whom God aids and protects the Muslim community, thereby suggesting for al-Ṣanʿānī, an association between these figures, and the (heretofore) Syrian-specific *abdāl*. As with above, the source here also hesitatingly adds, "I believe he [also] said, by them you are protected [from harm/evil]."[213] In the last *ḥadīth* in this section, the Companion Kaʿb declares that he has found in the Qur'an, indications that Syria is "God's treasure on earth, and in it are His treasure among His creation."[214] Therefore, while one tradition in al-Ṣanʿānī moves the development of the saintly *abdāl* forward, the *abdāl* remain associated with Syria, and moreover, they are still enmeshed with polemics arising from the first Muslim Civil War.

In the generations after al-Ṣanʿānī and Ibn al-Mubārak, the *abdāl* are progressively stripped of historical markers, and their function as patrons on earth becomes more prominent. The few references to the *abdāl* and saintly hierarchy in Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal's *Musnad* alert us to developments in this process. In this work, the old tradition of ʿAlī's is reported as follows:

> The people of Syria were mentioned in the presence of ʿAlī when he was in Iraq. They said to him: "curse them." He replied: "I will not, for I have heard the prophet say: '*al-abdāl* are in Syria. They are forty men; every time one of them dies he is replaced with another. Through them, rain descends, and through them,

[213] Al-Ṣanʿānī, *Muṣannaf*, no. 20457, 11:250.
[214] Al-Ṣanʿānī, *Muṣannaf*, no. 20457, 11:250.

> one is granted victory over enemies, and through them, punishment is averted from the people of Syria.'"[215]

As Mikati observes, here ʿAlī cites the Prophet himself for the presence of the *abdāl* in Syria, a significant point, since this gives greater credence to the tradition.[216] Another important development is that Aḥmad's *ḥadīth* disguises the original context by making a general reference to Iraq. While the report yet again limits the *abdāl* to Syria and no doubt implicitly alludes to Syrian-Iraq hostilities, unlike its counterparts in Ibn al-Mubārak and al-Ṣanʿānī, this *ḥadīth* makes no *explicit* mention of the Battle of Siffīn, neither in the body of the report, nor in the supplementary information provided by the transmitters.

Interestingly, Aḥmad's sources are different altogether from those of his predecessors; [217] none of the transmitters in the earlier chains of this report appears in his, demonstrating that the tradition had enjoyed wider circulation, and no doubt, increasing susceptibility to accretions, by this point. This version of the tradition then, along with its new chain, furthers the association of Syrian honor with the *abdāl* purely by virtue of their being *abdāl*, and illustrates that this had achieved greater attestation by Aḥmad's time. Moreover, for the first time in recorded traditions, the *abdāl* are explicitly associated with a specific number, here, forty (recall that the earlier *ḥadīth* of the Seven does not explicitly mention the *abdāl*), thereby conclusively affirming the exclusivity of

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[215] Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, Musnad Aḥmad, no. 896, 2:231; also, in Ibn Ḥanbal, *Faḍā'il al-Ṣaḥābah*, no. 1727, 2:906; see also Rana Mikati, "The Syrian *abdāl*," 30. Between Aḥmad and ʿAbd Allāh Ibn al-Mubārak, another traditionist, Nuʿaym Ibn Ḥammād (d. 228/843) cites this *ḥadīth* as well, directly from Ibn al-Mubārak (and upwards with the same chain, tracing back to Ṣafwān Ibn ʿAbd Allāh. Nuʿaym Ibn Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, ed. Samīr Amīn al-Zuhayrī (Cairo: Maktabat al-Tawḥīd, 1412[/1991]), 1:23; as in Ibn al-Mubārak, the tradition in Ibn Ḥammād explicitly mentions the Day of Ṣiffīn.

[216] Mikati, "The Identity of the Syrian *abdāl,*" 30

[217] Aḥmad's chain is as follows: [Abd al-Quddūs Ibn al-Hajjāj] Abū al-Mughīrah (d. 212/828) ← Ṣafwān Ibn ʿAmr (d. 155/772) ← Shurayḥ Ibn ʿUbaid (d. Between 78/697 and 99/717); Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, Musnad Aḥmad, no. 896, 2:231.

this group. No doubt, this *ḥadīth* still functions to reflect a sort of Syrian exceptionalism, and to be clear, there are various indications in Ibn Ḥanbāl's work that the *abdāl* were still generally associated with Syria specifically. In one such *ḥadīth*, the Prophet predicts a conflict within the Muslim community that will ensue after the death of an unnamed caliph; as he explains, a man will then flee from Medina to Mecca, presumably disappointed by the conflict. Then, we are told, the people of Mecca will force him out of his home and swear allegiance to him as their leader. Thereupon, a Syrian army will be sent to fight this new leader, but the army will be swallowed up by the desert; upon witnessing this, "the *abdāl* of Syria, and the forces (*ʿaṣā'ib*) of Iraq" will come to pledge their allegiance with this leader. The *ḥadīth* goes on to explain that this leader will usher in seven or nine years (the sources express uncertainty about the original number transmitted) of peace during which he will lead in accordance prophetic guidance.[218]

Regardless of this *ḥadīth*'s intended import,[219] the association of the *abdāl* with Syria is clear, as is the connection to historical Syria-Iraq hostilities, given the juxtaposition of the Syrian *abdāl* with the so-called *ʿaṣā'ib* of Iraq, who will finally unite under this great leader.[220] Indeed, before Ibn Ḥanbal, the traditionist Nuʿaym Ibn Ḥammād (d. 227/842), also bears testimony to the association of the *abdāl* with other

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[218] Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, no. 26689, 44:286. A version of this *ḥadīth* also appears in a compilation by traditionist Abū Dāwūd; see Abū Dāwūd Sulaymān al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, ed. Shuʿayb al-Arna'ūṭ (Beirut: Dār al-Risālah al-ʿĀlamiyya, 2009), no. 4686, 6:344.

[219] It seems clear that the context of the tradition is the Second Civil War, and that it serves to validate the campaign of the anticaliph, ʿAbd Allāh Ibn al-Zubayr (d. 73/692). Wilferd Madelung has traced the *ḥadīth* to polemics surrounding Ibn al-Zubayr's occupation of Mecca in defiance of the Syrian claimant to the caliphate, Yazīd; see Madelung, "ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Zubayr and the Mahdī," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 40, no. 4 (1981): 291.

[220] The term *ʿāṣā'ib* denotes a party or company of individuals banded together in defense. In this and other such *ḥadīth* however, the term is particularly associated with Iraq, as a counterpart to the Syrian *abdāl*, so that they are more than just a band of soldiers. One common reading explains *ʿāṣā'ib* as "the best of them," apparently based on a recorded common connotation for the term. See Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Sharaf al-Haqq Muḥammad Ashraf al-Ṣiddīqī al-ʿAẓīmābādī (d. 1326/1908), *Awn al-Maʿbūd ʿala Sharḥ Sunan Abī Dawūd* (Beirūt: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1995), 11:254.

eschatological traditions. In his *Kitāb al-Fitān* (On [Apocalyptic] Strife), the traditionist collects several *ḥadīth* on apocalyptic conflicts between the Mahdī and the Sufyāni, two eschatological figures who appear in early traditions.[221] In one *ḥadīth*, the *abdāl* are explicitly mentioned as coming to the aid of "the one who will take refuge in Mecca" (a clear reference to the Mahdī) against the so-called "Sufyānīs."[222] Though the tradition does not explicitly mention Syria in connection with the *abdāl*, an assumed connection in this work is not farfetched given that Ibn Ḥammād also reports the Ṣiffīn *ḥadīth* on the *abdāl*, as discussed above.

Yet, though we have this Syrian identification with the *abdāl* in Ibn Ḥammād and Ibn Ḥanbal, the latter also transmits another *ḥadīth* on the *abdāl* which is devoid of any associations with Syria. In this tradition, the Companion, ʿUbādah Ibn al-Ṣāmit relates that the Prophet said, "the *abdāl* in my Community are thirty [individuals] modeled after Abraham, the Special Friend (*khalīl*) of the Merciful,[223] whenever a man [from their group] dies, God puts (*abdala*) a man in his place."[224] There is no reference here to Syria, nor to the Battle of Siffīn, and again, the *abdāl* are enigmatically delimited, here at thirty-three. This thus corroborates a trend of detaching the *abdāl* from a specific, localized history, existing alongside the older, longstanding current of associating them with Syria, as both appear in the same text. Considered altogether then, Aḥmad's traditions on the

[221] On the Mahdī in Sunnī and Shi'ī Islam, his relation to other apocalyptic figures, and the role of this figure in various millenialist movements, see Said Amir Arjomand, "Islamic Apocalypticism in the Classic Period," in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, eds. Bernard McGinn, John Joseph Collins, and Stephen J. Stein (New York: Continuum Intl Publ Group, 1998), 2: 249-275.
[222] Nuʿaym Ibn Ḥammād, *al-Fitan*, 1:347.
[223] A reference to Q 4:125, in which God endearingly refers to Abraham as His *khalīl*, the only time this word is used to describe God's relationship with a person. For a brief discussion on the place of Abraham in the Qur'an, see Carol Bakhos, "Abraham," *Blackwell Companion to Qur'an*, eds Andrew Rippin and Jawid Mojaddedi (New Jersey: Blackwell, 2017), 280-287.
[224] Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 37:413.

abdāl reflect the persistence of the association between the *abdāl* and historical events, alongside the development of a counter-tradition which divorces the *abdāl* from these events and begins to depict them as saints who serve to protect not just the believers in Syria, but all believers.

By the time we reach Ibn Abī al-Dunyā (208/823-281/894**)**, the association between the *abdāl* and the *Awliyā'* seems to be more firmly entrenched and receives further elaboration in *ḥadīth*. In his compilation, *Kitāb al-Awliyā'* (The Book on the Friends), the author includes a *ḥadīth* which once again associates the Companion ʿAlī with explaining the *abdāl*. This time however, ʿAlī is depicted as merely recounting to a fellow companion a time when he asked the Messenger of God who the *abdāl* were. In response, the Prophet explains,

> They are sixty…they did not attain their position through their fasting much, nor by praying and giving in charity a great deal, but rather with their generous souls and pure hearts, and their sincere counsel for their leaders. O ʿAlī, in my community, they are rarer than red sulfur.[225]

The *ḥadīth* of course assumes that ʿAlī had already been apprised of a category of humans called the *abdāl*, as though the Prophet had preached about this special group on more than one occasion. Recall that the earliest *ḥadīth* has ʿAlī simply informing his men that amongst the Syrian faction on the other side of his war are the *abdāl*. Here, there is the subtext of lore about the *abdāl* that the Prophet has taught, and at one point, ʿAlī merely seeks further elaboration on these *abdāl*. The *ḥadīth* also advances the decontextualization of the *abdāl* in the absence of any reference to Syria or the Battle of Ṣiffīn and doesn't place ʿAlī in a specific location (Iraq, in earlier reports). Time and place are unspecified and rendered irrelevant for this tradition; they are immaterial for

[225] Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitab al-Awliyā'*, 12.

understanding who the *abdāl* are, as ʿAlī arbitrarily informs a fellow companion of a certain moment when the Prophet expounded on the *abdāl* upon his request. This framing is a far cry from the earliest tradition; read in isolation, these other reports provide no indication of the *abdāl* being connected to a specific time and/or place. The tradition is almost certainly of late provenance, making its first recorded appearance in Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, and then showing up again later in the fifth/eleventh century collection of traditions on *karāmāt al-Awliyā'* by al-Ḥasan al-Khallāl (d. 439/1047).[226]

In his chapter on the *abdāl*, Ibn Abī al-Dunyā corroborates the notion of an exclusive group for whose sake the world turns, demonstrating increasing attention to the ranks within the *Awliyā'*, inclusive of the *abdāl*. While as in Ibn Ḥanbal, Ibn Abī al-Dunyā's work contains echoes of the earlier traditions,[227] here, there are more *ḥadīth* on the *abdāl* than in his predecessors, most of which are depoliticized. In one *ḥadīth*, the Prophet states, "the *budalā'* [a linguistic variant for *abdāl*] of my Nation do not enter Paradise by way of much prayer and fasting nor charity, but rather by God's mercy, self-contentment, and purity of heart," a tradition which is only recorded in the third/ninth century onward.[228] The author also transmits in the same section, the aforementioned

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[226] Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan al-Khallāl, *Karāmāt al-Awliyā li'Abī Muḥammad al-Khallāl*, ed. Usāma al-Sharīf (Beirut: Dār al-Mashārīʿ, 2007), no. 14, p. 26. The first common transmitter between the two is Yaʿqūb Ibn Muḥammad al-Zuhrī (d. ~208/804). The renowned premodern Sunnī polymath, al-Suyuṭī (d. 911/1505), confirms Ibn Abī al-Dunyā and al-Ḥasan al-Khallāl as the only sources of the tradition in question; see Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥāwī li'l-Fhatāwī* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr li'ṭ-Ṭabāʿah wa al-Nashr, 2004), 2:293.

[227] Ibn Abī al-Dunyā transmits the very same Ṣiffīn tradition found in ʿAbd al-Razzāq, with only two persons between him and ʿAbd al-Razzāq in the chain; Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitab al-Awliyā*, 30. He also reports another tradition wherein the Prophet states, "the sign of the *abdāl* of my Nation is that they never curse anything," harkening to the early tradition against insulting Syrians; Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitab al-Awliyā*, no. 59, p. 28.

[228] Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-Awliyā'*, no. 58, p. 28; this is the earliest record of the tradition with a chain. It is also found earlier in al-Tirmidhī, but without a chain; see al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir al-Uṣūl*, no. 7, 1:263. Later, it appears in al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066), *Shuʿab al-Īmān*, no. 10892, pg. 7:439. The Common Link between al-Bayhaqī and Ibn Abī al-Dunyā is Ṣāliḥ al-Murrī (d. 172/788), much maligned in traditional

ḥadīth of the perennial Seven through whom believers receive rain and divine protection.[229] Further, we are told on the tongue of the companion Kaʿb al-Aḥbār (d. 32/653) that, "No people have come upon the earth after the people of Noah, except that within them are fourteen through whom God wards them [the people] from punishment." Here the indispensable nature of this group is conveyed by explaining the Elite as an institution which long predates the Prophet, going back to the time of Noah. In this report, al-Aʿmash (d. 148/765), one of the transmitters in the chain, states that he mentioned this to his teacher Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī (d. 96/717), presumably for confirmation and/or elaboration, who then explained, "it used to be said that if there were five, they [i.e., humanity] would not be punished;"[230] this extends the notion that there needs be certain patron saints on earth, be they few as five, so that on their behalf, God may stay His punishment. Because the tradition does not claim to return to the Prophet and given the personalizing detail of al-Aʿmash consulting with his teacher, we may conservatively assume the gist of the tradition dates at least to al-Nakhaʿī (late first/early eighth century). The idea of a protective few is further confirmed in another *ḥadīth* wherein the distinguished Companion Ibn ʿAbbās states, "So long as there are five [of such Friends] on it [earth], they would not be punished."[231] While these traditions do not

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ḥadīth criticism so that we are better off attributing the tradition to him. On his reputation among early traditionists, see the negative assessments reported in Ibn ʿAdī Al-Jurjānī (d. 365/9760, *al-Kāmil fī Ḍuʿafā' al-Rijāl*, no. 912, pp. 5:92-98.

[229] Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-Awliyā'*, 30. Again, this is through ʿAbd al-Razzāq's chain with the same informants as in the previous *ḥadīth*; Al-Ṣanʿānī, *Muṣannaf*, no. 20457, 11:250. Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitab al-Jihād*, no. 195, p. 172. After Ibn al-Mubārak, the chain is as follows: Maʿmar [Ibn Rāshid] (d. 153 AH) ←Ayyūb [al-Sakhtiyāni] (d. 131 AH) ← Abū Qilābah (d. 104 AH), so that we are justified in tracing the tradition to at least the time of Abū Qilāba. For more on Abū Qilābāh's role in the transmission of *ḥadīth*, including a discussion on this very common chain of his, see Motzki, *Analysing Muslim Traditions*, 395-403.

[230] Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-Awliyā',* no. 61, p. 28. The same *ḥadīth* is transmitted in the *Ḥilyah* of Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣbahānī, with the same three transmitters at the top of his chain (Al-Aʿmash ← Sālim Ibn Abī al-Jaʿd ← Kaʿb); al-Iṣbahānī, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'*, 6:20.

[231] Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-Awliyā'*, no. 62, p. 28.

mention the *abdāl*, for Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, those distinguished figures that have always existed in the communities of yesteryear and which supposedly continue in Muḥammad's nation are in some way identified, or overlap, with the *abdāl* (again, these *ḥadīth* all come in a chapter of *ḥadīth* describing the *abdāl*), and for him, they are clearly a more exclusive subset of the *Awliyā'*.

An important tradition which buttresses this association between the *abdāl* and the primordial elect is that which Ibn Abī al-Dunyā associates with Abū al-Zinād (d. 130/748),[232] himself a generation removed from the Companions:

> When prophethood ended—and they [the prophets] were the Stakes (*āwtād*) of the earth—God brought in their place *forty* men *from the Community of Muḥammad*, called *al-abdāl***.** Not one of them dies except that God appoints another in his place to succeed him. They are the Stakes (*awtād*) of the earth. Thirty of them have hearts [molded on] Abraham's [heart of] certitude. They have not surpassed others by their (performing) many prayers, nor much fasting, nor by distinction in self-abasement or [outward] self-composure, but rather, through sincere piety and excellence of intention, and purity of heart, and sincere concern for all Muslims in pursuit of God's pleasure, with patience, goodness, righteousness, gentleness of spirit, and humility [even] without humiliation (*fī ghayr madhilla*). And, know that they do not curse a thing, nor harm others, nor do they exalt themselves over any individual below them, nor treat them with contempt. [Likewise] they do not envy anyone above them. They do not affect self-abasement (*laysū mutakhashshiʿīn*) nor feign piety-induced frailty (*laysū mutawāmitīn*); they are not self-conceited and are not consumed with self-regard, and they are not enamored of this world. They are not [such that] one day they are engrossed with pious fear, and the next, heedless.[233]

In Abū al-Zinād's statement, the perpetual presence of the *abdāl*, is sustained, and yet again, they are limited to a specific number, thereby establishing their exclusivity. We are told that they earn their rank not by the mere performance of ritual, but through moral

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[232] On whom, see Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, *Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalā',* eds. Shuʿayb al-Arna'ūṭ and Muḥammad Naʿīm al-ʿArqūsī (Damascus: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1982), 5:445-451.
[233] Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-Awliyā'*, no. 57, p. 27. See also the discussion in Amikam Elad, "Community of Believers of 'Holy Men' and 'Saints' or Community of Muslims? The Rise and Development of Early Muslim Historiography," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 47, no. 1 (2002): 264.

and spiritual excellence. Yet again, there is no mention of Syria or the Battle of Ṣiffīn in the *ḥadīth*, and they clearly stand at the service of all the believers as spiritual heirs to the office of Prophethood. Like Prophets, they too are "stakes" (*awtād*) of the earth, ensuring its stability, for God initiated them as an ever-present institution after bringing the era of the prophets to a close.

In most of Ibn Abī al-Dunyā's traditions on the *abdāl*, we find no clear reference to a historical or situational context for these personalities. Unlike in the earlier compilations, there is very little hint of pro-Syrian propaganda or of an agenda to vindicate early Muslim strife, excepting, the single tradition which mentions Ṣiffīn, and potentially, the reference to the *abdāl* as characterized by avoiding the act of vilification. Barring these two, in the remaining *ḥadīth*, the *abdāl* are not defined by local context. Instead, a purpose of serving creation at large is much more prominent, and the *abdāl* stand as a perpetual group who come to fill the void engendered by the Prophet's demise; as stakes for the earth, through them, God provides favors to the believers and refrains from manifesting His anger.

As we can see, by the middle of the third/ninth century, the notion of a hierarchy of saints, with the *abdāl* somewhere at the top, had spread within traditionist circles. In this period, Muslims continued to refine the concept of the *walī*, clarifying how one attains this position and the functions associated with it; this coincided with the increasing circulation of traditions which corroborated the presence of identifiable ranks among the *Awliyā'*. In the *Nawādir al-Uṣūl fī Aḥādīth al-Rasūl* (Priceless Foundations in the Traditions of the Messenger) of the mystic theologian and traditionist, al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 298/910), we find elaborations on earlier traditions, but also, an attempt to

reconcile between these various traditions and to conceptualize therefrom an understanding of *wilāyah*. While al-Tirmidhī is most famous for his treatise on the *Awliyā'*, namely his *Sīrat al-Awliyā'* (The Life of the Friends of God),[234] which I discuss in forthcoming chapters, here I focus on his *Nawādir al-Uṣul* as it, like the other works covered in this chapter, is a primarily a compilation of *ḥadīth*. At the same time, because the author also provides commentary on the traditions, his work stands at the nexus of *ḥadīth* documentation and more formal treatments on the *Awliyā'* and their functions, which also begin to appear in the third/ninth century (as discussed in the next chapter).[235] It must be noted that by and large, al-Tirmidhī does not provide chains for his traditions in this work, and instead, simply presents the most immediate source for each (e.g., the Companion who allegedly reports a statement from the Prophet); as such we will concern ourselves only with the text of the traditions without regard to dating them, taking their contents as indicative of some of the ideas circulating in his time.

In Chapter 51 of his work, al-Tirmidhī cites several traditions on the Friends which echo and elaborate on the ideas present in earlier works. After presenting the tradition which restricts the *abdāl* to thirty whose hearts are as that of Abraham, side by side with that which speaks of the *abdāl* as forty, he moves to defend both traditions against the semblance of contradiction. His claim, in short, is that the *abdāl* are in fact forty in number, thirty of whose hearts are modeled on that of Abraham, hence the variations in the traditions.[236] Al-Tirmidhī then corroborates this tradition with another

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[234] The work is translated in Bernd Radtke and John O'Kane, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islam*, 38-97.

[235] What follows builds on the findings in Sara Sviri's recent monograph on al-Tirmidhī; while some of the traditions she mentions appear here, the translations are mine, unless otherwise noted. See Sara Sviri, *Perspectives on Early Islamic Mysticism: The World of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī and His Contemporaries* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

[236] Al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir*, 1:261-262.

wherein the Companion Abū al-Dardā' speaks of those human Stakes of the earth as numbering forty individuals of truth (*ṣiddīqūn*), thirty of whose hearts mirror that of Abraham.[237] While some of the traditions in the *Nawādir* bear traces of development from earlier traditions reflecting pro-Syrian propaganda, al-Tirmidhī's stance is clearly that the elites among the saints are not exclusive to Syria; in the first reported tradition, the Companion Anas Ibn Mālik is alleged to have taught that the Substitutes (*budalā*) are "forty men: twenty-two in Syria, eighteen in Iraq. Whenever one of them dies, another is put in his place. When the Day of Judgments commences, they will all die."[238] One obvious implication of this tradition is a clear denial of the *abdāl* as exclusively associated with Syria, for they are also to be found in Iraq.[239] Along the same vein, another *ḥadīth* has the Companion Hudhaifah Ibn al-Yamān explain that the *abdāl* (again with Abrahamic hearts) number thirty in Syria, and the *ʿuṣab* (a variant for *ʿaṣā'ib,* discussed below) in Iraq number forty, twenty of them with the acumen of Christ, and twenty who have been given the wind instruments of David. Like the *abdāl*, Hudhaifah

[237] Al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir*, 1:262 This is a very long *ḥadīth* that almost surely brings together disparate traditions into one; it includes the following points: upon the expiration of the prophets (who were stakes of the earth), God established the *abdāl*: forty men of truth (*ṣiddīqūn*), thirty with Abraham's certitude of heart. The *abdāl* do not earn their rank by way of ritual performance but by rectification of character, thereby becoming viceregents (*khulafā'*) of the Prophet. Whenever one of them passes, God puts another individual in his place, so that group is never short of forty. By them, God wards off calamities from humankind and provides for them. The *ḥadīth* goes on to list their various moral qualities.

[238] Al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir*, 1261; to my knowledge, this is the earliest version of this *ḥadīth*. It also appears later in Ibn ʿAdī' al-Jurjānī's work on unreliable transmitters of *ḥadīth*, where he cites a figure (al-ʿAlā' Ibn Zayd al-Thaqafī) who transmits the same *ḥadīth* from the Companion Anas Ibn Mālik as unreliable. See Ibn ʿAdī al-Jurjānī (d. 365/975), *Kitāb al-Kāmil*, no. 1375, p. 6:378.

[239] One might also wonder why Syria and Iraq should be the only places where the *abdāl* are found; or even, considering the more popular tradition, why two juxtaposed bands (the *abdāl* and the *ʿaṣā'ib*) should appear only in these two regions. This obsession with Syria and Iraq no doubt betrays the origins of the tradition: tensions between the two regions during the First and Second Civil Wars. It would seem this particular *ḥadīth* is an attempt to pacify these anxieties by associating the *abdāl* with both regions.

explains that the *ʿuṣab* are maintained at forty so that each one who passes is replaced by another individual.[240]

To my knowledge, this tradition as it appears in al-Tirmidhī is the first time we find the depiction of the *ʿuṣāb/ʿaṣā'ib* of Iraq so closely reflecting that of the *abdāl* as a perpetual institution of spiritual heirs to prophets. This tradition on the *ʿuṣab* is no doubt directly related to an earlier counter-tradition to the Syrian association with the *abdāl* which, as we saw earlier, sought to recognize individuals of distinction in Iraq, namely the *ʿaṣa'ib*, as parallels to the *abḍāl* of Syria. Following the tradition, al-Tirmidḥī himself explains that "the *ʿusab* are men who resemble the *abdāl*."[241] In short, while al-Tirmidhī does transmit reports that associate the *abdāl* with Syria, notably, he also presents two traditions which problematize this association: one wherein the Companion Anas places the *abdāl* in *both* Syria and Iraq, and another which explicitly speaks of the *abdāl* as resembling the *ʿuṣab* while also figuring both in strikingly similar language. Moreover, whereas the earliest compilations typically place ʿAlī as the source of the *abdāl* tradition, in al-Tirmidhī, not only is there no explicit reference to the Battle of Siffīn, but also, not one of the traditions mentioned is attributed to the Companion ʿAlī. The complete erasure of ʿAlī in these traditions is a crucial step in decontextualizing the *abdāl*; not only does this suggest a tradition so widespread as to be reported with other chains of transmission, but also, by sidestepping ʿAlī altogether, the heated context of the ʿAli-Muʿāwiyah conflicts is completely elided; the traditions in al-Tirmidhī illustrate that the historical

[240] Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir*, 1:263.
[241] Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir*, 1:263.

details could now be construed as inconsequential in understanding the nature of the *abdāl*.[242]

As with Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, al-Tirmidhī's traditions extend the notion that as representatives (*khulafā'*) of the Prophets, the *abdāl* have come to fill the void left in Prophet Muḥammad's absence. To this end, Al-Tirmidhī transmits a different variant of an earlier *ḥadīth* which explains that upon the end of prophethood, God put in the place of the prophets, "a people from the Community of Aḥmad,[243] called the *abdāl*."[244] While limiting this group to forty as in earlier traditions, this *ḥadīth* speaks broadly of them being from the greater Muslim community, without reference to a specific location; moreover, unlike the *abdāl* in Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal's report, which are said to protect the people of Syria specifically,[245] these *abdāl*, ensure the protection "of the people of the earth" generally.[246] They are thus transformed from spiritual protectors of Syria especially to patron saints for all of humanity.

Another similar tradition in al-Tirmidhī has it that, "the earth complained to God, the Exalted, of the withdrawal of prophets and the cessation of prophethood, so God responded to the earth, 'I will place upon you forty People of Truth (*siddiqūn*),' and then earth was at ease."[247] In this *ḥadīth*, we find another term for the elite, the *ṣiddīqūn*, a

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[242] Cf. to Mikati's analysis, in which she also argues that al-Tirmidhī's work is "another step that will take these saints further form their original context in the Battle of Ṣiffīn" and that "with al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī the *abdāl*… lose any association with Syria;" Mikati, "The identity of the Syrian *abdal*," 33.
[243] "Aḥmad" is an alternative name for the Prophet Muḥammad; it makes an appearance in Qur'an, 61:6, where it is normally interpreted in this way.
[244] Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir*, 1:262. This is put on the tongue of the companion Abū al-Dardā', with the full *ḥadīth* agreeing with that of Abū al-Zinād in Ibn Abī al-Dunyā's *Kitāb al-Awliyā'* as described above in fn. 84, though with minor variations in the text.
[245] Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, no. 896, 2: 231.
[246] Al-Hakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Nawadir*, 1:262.
[247] Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir*, 1:263. The source of this *ḥadīth* is not mentioned; al-Tirmidhī simply states, "it is transmitted in the traditions that…"

Qur'ānic designation for those characterized by trustworthiness, sincerity, and truth; for al-Tirmidhī, they are called *ṣiddīqūn* to correspond to the nature of their hearts, which are characterized by pure, unadulterated attachment to God.[248] The parallels between the *ṣiddiqūn* and the *abdāl* (both who number forty), alongside their presence in the same chapter on describing the *abdāl* suggest that the two groups are one and the same, or at least intersect. Throughout al-Trmidhī's discussion, the *siddiqūn* are defined by certain personality traits, never by place. On them, he writes,

> They are distinguished from the [rest of] creation by sincerity of heart with God, and not by sincerity of actions [i.e., rituals] like the angels and the *ʿummāl*.[249] [As for the latter], their hearts have no path to God; their hearts only have a path to compensation [from the divine for their actions]. As for the prophets and the *Ṣiddīqūn,* the veil has been lifted for them and there manifested for them a path to God, for them to worship Him as though they see Him.[250]

Al-Tirmidhī's comments on the *ṣiddiqūn*, another designation for the choicest of the Friends, notably lacks any reference to privilege of place. Thus, in her analysis of al-Tirmidhī's work, Sara Sviri explains that the doctrine implicit in his traditions is that given the absence of the prophets who were anchors of the earth, "by pledging that a definite number of righteous men (*ṣiddīqīna arbaʿīna* [Forty Truthful Ones]) would perpetually become the successors (*khulafā*) of the prophets, God promises to vouchsafe the well-being of the entire world."[251] In other words, al-Tirmidhī's discourse on the Forty Truthful Ones cannot be divorced from that on the *abdāl*; both are overlapping categories within the Friends of God.

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[248] Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir* 1:263.
[249] Plural for the word *ʿāmil*, denoting one who acts/performs actions; in al-Tirmidhī's theology (and that of other mystics), this is a reference to those who unduly center rituals and external worship generally, in their conception of religion, not giving internal, spiritual work its due place above all other concerns. We will return to this issue in forthcoming chapters.
[250] Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir*, 1:263-264. Their worshipping God "as though they see Him" is a reference to the famous *Ḥadīth* of Union discussed above.
[251] Sviri, *Perspectives on Early Islamic Mysticism*, 222.

Likely by the beginning of the fifth/eleventh century, the decontextualization of the *abdāl* tradition is virtually complete. In a collection of traditions on the *Awliyā'* by Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣbahānī (d. 430/1038),[252] earlier *ḥadīth* on the *abdāl* are combined and adjusted so that for example we have the Prophet saying, "the best of my Community in each generation are five hundred, and the *abdāl* are forty" and that "neither the five hundred nor the forty ever decrease [in number]," for God constantly enlists individuals from one group to reinforce the other when an individual passes.[253] When the companions ask the Prophet to describe the actions of the *abdāl*, he responds with, "they forgive those who wrong them, are kind to those who do evil to them, and mutually aid one another with that which God gives them." The most notable aspect of this *ḥadīth* for our purposes is that beyond advancing the perpetual nature of the *abdāl* and placing them in the context of a broader spiritual hierarchy, the *ḥadīth* continues the trend of detaching the tradition from ʿAlī and the Battle of Siffīn, neither of which is mentioned in the tradition. A similar *ḥadīth* speaks of various numbers of elites, each associated with particular prophets: three hundred whose hearts are like that of Adam, forty like that of Moses, seven like that of Abraham, five like that of the angel Gabriel, three like that of the angel Michael, and one like that of the angel Isrāfīl.[254] The Believers are sustained by

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[252] On whom, see W. Madelung, "Abū Noʿaym Al-eṣfahānī," *Encyclopædia Iranica,* I/4: 354-355. An updated version is available online at https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/abu-noaym-al-esfahani-al-hafez-ahmad-b (accessed 24 October 2022).

[253] Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'*, 1:8. There is no record of an earlier version of this Ḥadīth; it appears later in the works of Ibn ʿAsākir (d. 571/1176) and Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201). See Abū al-Qāsim Ibn ʿAsākir, *Kitāb Tārīkh Dimashq*, ed. ʿAmr Ibn Gharāmah al-ʿUmrawī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995), no. 3612, p. 33:341-342; and Abū al-Faraj ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-Mawḍūʿāt*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad ʿUthmān (Medina, Saudi Arabia: al-Maktabah al-Salafiyyah, 1968), 3:151-152. Note that Abū Nuʿaym appears in Ibn al-Jawzī's chain. As indicated by the title of his work, Ibn al-Jawzī considers this to be a fabricated *ḥadīth* by virtue of an unreliable transmission (due, he argues, to the presence of unknown and thus unverified persons in the chain).

[254] Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'*, 1:9 This clearly reflects a more advanced typology of the *awliyā'* which has developed by al-Iṣbahānī's time. As with the preceding *ḥadīth*, Abū Nuʿaym's is the earliest

them because God answers their prayers for the community's growth, for rain, for vegetation, and for protection against calamities. As usual, to keep their respective numbers intact, God continuously replaces (*abdala*) those who pass in one group with an individual from a lower group. Here again, we find the ranks of the spiritual hierarchy expanded, and at the same time, the *abdāl* are decontextualized. Consider finally the following discussion on the *abdāl* which Abū Nuʿaym attributes not to the Prophet, but to the important third/ninth century mystic Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. ca 245/859-60):[255]

> They [*abdāl*] are a people who remember God with their hearts, glorifying their Lord out of their awareness of His majesty. Thus, they are the proofs (*ḥujaj*) of God for His creation. He clothed them with the light which radiates from His love, and raised for them the banners of guidance toward joining Him, and established them in the station of the courageous [in complying with] His will, and poured upon them self-restraint against disobeying Him and purified their bodies with their constant regard (*murāqabah*) for Him, and perfumed them with the scent of those who engaged beautifully with God, and clothed them with garments of the fabric of His love. He placed upon their heads crowns of joy, then he deposited within their hearts secrets of the unseen [i.e., hidden knowledge] so that their hearts are transfixed on meeting Him, and their thoughts are solely occupied with Him. Their eyes gaze upon Him, in the unseen. He has established them at the door of Sight[ing Him], in proximity to Him, and sat them on the thrones of the best of the folk who have gnosis of Him.[256]

Beyond elevating the stature of the *abdāl,* yet again, in Dhū al-Nūn's statement there is no indication whatsoever of the contentious context surrounding the original *abdāl* in the Ṣiffīn tradition. Here, they are simply, a group of individuals who have attained the ideal of servitude and adoration for God. As is clear from this and the previous *ḥadīth*, Abū Nuʿaym's work reflects the overwhelming success of the trend to transform the *abdāl*

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record of this tradition. The tradition appears in later works, e.g., Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh Dimashq*, 1:303, and Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Mawḍūʿāt,* 3:150-151. *Israfīl* is an angel discussed in extra-Qur'anic literature; he is associated most notably with blowing the Trumpet on the Day of Judgment to arouse humankind from their sleep. See, A. J. Wensinck, "Isrāfil," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 4:211.

[255] On whose important legacy, see Michael Ebstein, "Ḏū l-Nūn al-Miṣrī and Early Islamic Mysticism," *Arabica* 61, no. 5 (2014): 559-612.

[256] Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'*, 1:12.

into timeless spiritual heirs of the Prophet. By his time (fourth/tenth-fifth/eleventh century), the *abdāl* are presented primarily as consummate servants of God, and as individuals that humankind can look to for divine protection and favor.

3.4 Conclusion

For the early Muslim community, the death of the Prophet Muḥammad (year 11/632) marked the end of prophecy on earth.[257] Muslims have long understood the Qur'ānic reference to Muḥammad as the "Seal (*khātam/khātim*) of the Prophets" (Q 33:40) as signaling that with Muḥammad, God has "sealed" Prophethood on earth; in other words, after a long history of human prophets, God would no longer send a prophet to humankind after Muḥammad.[258] This conception of Muḥammad as the "Seal" is intertwined with various assumptions about the functions of Muḥāmmad's prophethood (and prophethood generally) and the revelation he preached. As the seal, the Prophet was the culmination of prophethood, and the Qur'ān with which he presented is the

[257] Sviri, *Perspectives on Early Islamic Mysticism*, 217.

[258] There has been some debate (from within and without the Islamic tradition) on whether the Qur'anic "Seal of the Prophets" denotes finality. The earliest interpreters of the Qur'ān were not unanimous on this point, and some orientalists have argued that this a post-Qur'ānic theology read into the Qur'ān (these two groups took their findings to different ends). See generally, Y. Friedmann, "Finality of Prophethood in Sunnī Islām," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 7, (1986): 178-215. For a unique, albeit unconvincing argument that in referring to Muḥammad as the "Seal," the Qur'an means to figure Muḥammad as primarily confirming and completing the work of the Israelite Prophet, Moses, in particular, see, Hartmut Bobzin, "The 'Seal of the Prophets': Towards an Understanding of Muḥammad's Prophethood," in *The Qur'ān in Context*, eds. Gerhard Böwering and Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 565-581. For an argument which traces this theology to the end of the 1st century AH, see David Powers, *Muḥammad is not the Father of Any of Your Men: The Making of the Last Prophet* (University of Pennsylvania Press: 2009), especially 50-57 and 225-227. For a more radical position which challenges Powers and argues for a 3rd/9th century provenance of this theology, see G. R. Hawting, "Review of Powers (2009)," *Islamic Law and Society* 18, (2011), 116-130. For a discussion and (negative) appraisal of Hawting and Powers, with an argument for the Qur'ān as the foundation of this theology, see Uri Rubin, "The Seal of the Prophets and the Finality of Prophecy: On the Interpretation of the Qur'ānic Sūrat al-Aḥzāb (33)," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlädischen Gesselschaft* 164, no. 1 (2014): 65-96. I assume, given overwhelming evidence (see Rubin's work), that the vast majority of early Muslims took it for granted that no Prophet was to follow Muḥammad, though it remains unclear that the Qur'ān's "Seal" is definitively the source of this theology.

quintessence of divine guidance, recapitulating and eternalizing once and for all, God's message to His servants.

Crucially, as the Seal of Prophets, Muslims understood that Muḥammad alongside the Qur'ān, provided the final instructions on how to embody reverence to God, serving as *the* model for faith personified: "Indeed, in the Messenger of God you have an excellent example for whoever has hope in God and the Last Day, and remembers God often" (Q 33:21). Not only does the Qur'ān instruct believers to "obey God and obey the Messenger," more pointedly, it declares, "Whoever obeys the Messenger thereby obeys God" (Q 4:80).[259] Therefore, for the earliest Muslims, the Prophet's presence among his followers in his time thwarted any debate on the source of divine authority on earth, for the locus of this authority was the Prophet himself. After his death, however, identifying the gateway(s) to the Divine here on earth became a matter of serious contention; Who would be the true "inheritors" of the prophets? What was the nature of this inheritance? Would they inherit the Prophet's spiritual authority, his political authority, or both? Such questions were at the heart of sectarian debates following the Prophet's death. By and large, most Muslims after the Prophet continued to recognize the Prophet's teachings and practices, the so-called *sunnah* (custom; precedent), as authoritative in defining Islam, and there thus emerged a quest to define the *sunnah* and the parameters for retrieving it properly, engendering various epistemological methodologies for navigating existing oral and literary sources. For Sunnīs, this culminated in the mutual recognition of a number of methodological schools of jurisprudence (*madhab*, pl. *madhāhib*, lit., "position from which one proceeds") as acceptable; one could choose any of the four recognized

[259] See also Q 24:54 and Q 5:92.

methodological schools through which to elaborate Islamic jurisprudence.[260] The development of *fiqh* in this manner, particularly through the prism of the four madhhabs then, was one way in which Sunnī Islam embodied inheritance from the Prophet, a development exemplified in the following statement allegedly uttered by the Prophet, "the scholars are the heirs of the prophets."[261]

Alongside this attempt to preserve the link between the Muslim community and the Prophet was the coterminous development of another link, that of the *Friends of God*, which too is "bound up with the doctrine of the cessation of prophecy."[262] For Muslims, the Prophet was not just a conveyor belt for God's instructions, nor were Muslims simply concerned with robotically "observing" the external actions of the Prophet for them to follow; beyond this, the Prophet was their spiritual link to God. Again, this perception was no doubt facilitated by the Prophet's role as an *active* agent of God on earth who did not simply relay the words of God to his Companions, but also intervened with God on their behalf. Thus, the Qur'ān states, "It is not for a believing man or woman that they should have any choice in a matter when God and His Messenger have decided it" (Q 33:36). Note here that the verse does not speak only of God's decisions as final, but also, that of the Messenger. The first Muslims were instructed to bring their disputes before

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[260] See now, Ahmed El-Shamsy, *The Canonization of Islamic Law* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); cf. Wael Hallaq, *The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[261] Typically, the statement appears within a discussion on the merits of acquiring knowledge. The saying already appears in a *ḥadīth* compilation of the second/eighth century scholar, Wakīʿ Ibn al-Jarrāḥ (129/746-197/812), though here, attributed not to the Prophet, but instead, to one of his companions (Abū al-Dardā'); see Wakīʿ Ibn al-Jarrāh, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Farīwā'ī (Medina: Maktabat al-Dār, 1984), no. 519, 8333. Later, it is attributed to the Prophet directly, e.g., in the collections of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), Abū Dāwūd (d. 275/889), and Ibn Mājah (d. 273/887). Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 3541, p. 5:485; Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah* (al-Arnā'ūṭ) no 223, pp. 150-151; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, no. 21715, pp. 36:45-48. For more on the course the tradition took over time, see the editor's comments in cited edition of Ibn Ḥanbal's *Musnad*.

[262] Sviri, *Perspectives on Early Islamic Mysticism*, 217.

Muḥammad, so that he could "judge between them according to what is just" (Q 4:58). Beyond this, it was understood that the Prophet has special favor in improving the fate of the Believers, for he is instructed in the Qur'ān to seek forgiveness for himself as well as for the believers (Q 47:19); elsewhere, the Qur'ān addresses the Prophet with, "…If only they, when they wronged themselves, came to you and sought forgiveness from God, and had the Messenger prayed for their forgiveness, they would certainly have found God ever Accepting of Repentance, Most Merciful" (Q 4:64). Muḥammad's role as a *living* and *dynamic* link in the eyes of early Muslims to God can hardly be overstated; as Takim states, "the Muslim community (*umma*) that Muḥammad established in Medina was structured in accord with his personal charisma." Muḥammad commanded an "all-embracing authority" which "necessitated acceptance of his religious, moral, legal, and political authority."[263] This helps to explain why we find in an early Islamic grave inscription, dated to 71/690, an acknowledgment of the Prophet's death as "the greatest misfortune to have ever afflicted the people of Islam."[264]

The loss of the Prophet as a link to the Divine elucidates the reasons behind the emergence of the *Awliyā'* in Islamic culture following his demise. This loss must have informed the need to conceive of the *Awliyā'* as living representatives of God who could serve not only as exemplars, but also, whose prayers were answered, and whose very presence assured security, divine aid, and protection from disaster. Although prophets were no longer, this living link between God and humankind continued in the form of a "a spiritual hierarchy" of God's chosen ones, through whom the existence of the world

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[263] Liyakat N. Takim, *The Heirs of the Prophet: Charisma and Religious Authority in Shiʿite Islam* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2012), 4.
[264] See Leor Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave: Death Rites and the Making of Islamic Society* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2007), 20.

and its well-being could continue. As Elad states regarding the *abdāl*, "it is clear that the world exists due to them and that the *abdāl* play a vital role in the continued existence of the world and its functioning."[265] As these ideas began to circulate, they were advanced by corroborating statements put into the mouths of early, influential personalities, not least of which was the Prophet. In analyzing the *ḥadīth* of the first centuries on the *Awliyā'*, one senses that their development corresponds with this need to recognize living links to God, individuals who in some sense, wield the charisma of the Prophet, whose persons are thus inviolable, and who are not to be contravened. The more distant the Prophet becomes, the more this need is felt, and the more we find traditions that satisfy this need. As shown above, this trend is exemplified by the phenomenon of the *abdāl*; where the earliest traditions on the *abdāl* present them as politicized figures, they are gradually stripped of historicity over time, and instead, become a primordial institution of God's intimates which exists to protect humankind.

[265] Sviri, *Perspectives on Early Islamic Mysticism*, 217-222; see also Elad, "Community of Believers," 264.

CHAPTER 4: THE *AWLIYĀ'* AS THE TRUE HEIRS

4.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I explored how traditions on the merits of the *Awliyā'* began to spread by the end of the first/seventh century and saw marked growth from the third/ninth century onward. These traditions bolstered the emerging perception of saints as extensions of Prophet Muḥammad in that, as He did with the Prophet, God bestows His grace upon humanity by virtue of the presence of the *Awliyā'* on earth. In this chapter, I focus on how early Ṣūfī discourse from the third/ninth-fifth/eleventh centuries on the *Awliyā'* sought to legitimize the place of the *Awliyā'* in a competitive space for authority in Muslim society. Through this analysis, I hope to demonstrate how Ṣūfī polemics on these Friends of God illuminate our understanding of their presence and conversations surrounding their charisma in early Islamic history.

4.1 Establishing the Authority of the *Awliyā'*

Ṣūfī writers, those who saw themselves as responsible for cultivating the discipline of spirituality, were the first to present extensive commentary on the *Awliyā'* beyond the documentation of oral traditions, beginning in the third/ninth century. This, because the Ṣūfīs were soon associated (and associated themselves) with the phenomenon of *wilāyah*, with their exemplars becoming the *Awliyā'* per excellence. In their treatises, Ṣūfī writers sought to put to word their phenomenological awareness of *wilāyah* as conferring upon those who commanded it a charisma extending from that of the Prophet, transforming them into mediators on earth between humanity and Divinity. That is, their task was to unpack that knowledge which they had gained through their own experiences on the path of intimacy with God, and/or through their interactions with other masters

who had already traversed the path. Among the first systematic treatments which I consult in this chapter are the writings of three Baghdādī scholars, Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz (d. ca. 286/899),[266] Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd (d. 298/910),[267] and Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988),[268] alongside those of the following Persianate scholars, Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896),[269] al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. ca. 295-300/907-912),[270] Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhī (d. 380s/990s),[271] and Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072).[272]

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[266] I derive his teachings from a collection of his treatises, published in Abū Saʿīd Aḥmad Ibn ʿĪsā al-Kharrāz, *Rasā'il al-Kharrāz*, ed. Qāsim al-Sāmarrā'ī, *al-Majmaʿ al-ʿIlmī al-ʿIrāqī* 15, (1967): 108-212. One of these treatises, *Kitāb al-Ṣidq* (On Sincerity), has been translated in English as Arthur J. Arberry (trans.), *The Book of Truthfulness* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937). On the scholar's life and work, see Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, 7-10.

[267] Al-Junayd al-Baghdādī is among the most important personalities in the self-understanding of orthodox Sufism. He is associated with the promotion of a "sober" (that is, refined and disciplined) Sufism in Baghdad, in opposition to more ecstatic varieties that existed at his time; Western scholarship tends to highlight his role in enabling Sufism to become more palatable to (and thus, become seamlessly integrated into) the broader Sunnī movement. For discussions on al-Junayd's teachings, see Erik S. Ohlander, "al-Junayd al-Baghdādī: Chief of the Sect," in *Routledge Handbook on Sufism*, ed. Lloyd Rigeon (Oxfordshire, UK: Routledge, 2020), 32-45; Ahmet Karamustafa, "Walaya According to al-Junayd," in *Reason and Inspiration in Islam: Theology, Philosophy and Mysticism in Muslim Thought*, ed. Todd Lawson (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 64-70. For a more detailed discussion on his work alongside translations of his corpus, see Ali Hasan Abdel-Kader, *al-Junayd*, 1962.

[268] Abū Naṣr ʿAbd Allāh Ibn ʿAlī al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ fī al-Taṣawwuf*, ed. Reynold A. Nicholson (London: Luzac & Co., 1914); on the scholar, see Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, 67-70; see also Nicholson's English introduction to his edition al-Sarrāj's *al-Lumaʿ*, pp. I-XII.

[269] Sahl Ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, ed. Muḥammad Bāsil ʿUyūn al-Sūd (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2002); Sahl ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Tustarī. *Tafsīr al-Tustarī,* trans. Annabel Keeler and Ali Keeler (Amman, Jordan: Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2011). This work is written in by the hands of a disciple who reports al-Tustarī's teachings, and occasionally includes his own interpolations. The text is studied in Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur'ānic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Sahl at-Tustarī (d. 283/896)* (Berlin: De Gryuter, 1980).

[270] This is the very same al-Tirmidhī whose collection of *ḥadīth*, *Nawādir al-Uṣūl* was studied in the previous chapter. The author's *Sīrat al-Awliyā'* is the earliest extant work which extensively treats the nature of *wilāyah*. The Arabic text can be found in Muḥammad Ibn ʿAlī al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Kitāb Sīrat al-Awliyā'*, in *Thalāthat Muṣannafāt li'l-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī: Kitāb Sīrat al-Awliyā'*, *Jawāb al-Masā'il allatī sa'alahu Ahl Sarakhs ʿanhā, Jawāb Kitāb min al-Rayy*, ed. Bernd Radtke (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1992), 1-134; The work has been translated with running commentary in Bernd Radtke and John O'Kane (trans. and eds.), *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islam*, 38-211. Radtke is no doubt the doyen of al-Tirmidhī studies, and the reader will notice that his translation (co-authored) relies on his own edition of the Arabic. Throughout this work, I avail myself of Radtke and O'Kane's translation, except where otherwise stated.

[271] Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhī, *Kitāb al-Taʿarruf li-Madhhab Ahl al-Taṣawwuf*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Ṭayyib (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2012); the work has been translated in Arthur J. Arberry (trans. and eds.), *The Doctrine of the Sufis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993 [1935]). On the scholar's life and work, see Arberry's introduction to his translation.

[272] In the Sunnī tradition, al-Qushayrī is often perceived as a model orthodox Sunnī, with his being aligned with one of the four canonical schools of law (the *Shāfiʿī* school), one of the two schools in theology (the

These writers did not have to look far for justification of the *Awliyā'* as agents of God on earth; all could, and did, rely on traditions which were already circulating. As we have seen, the famous *Ḥadīth* of Union already presented the *walī* as somehow achieving union with God such that God becomes "the eyes with which he sees, the ears with which he ears…," and God answers her every prayer. The early Ṣūfī writers expanded on this image of union by arguing that when the *walī* enters into the presence of the Divine, he experiences an effacement (*fanā*) of the self and thereby loses all subjectivity; the majesty of the Divine is so overwhelming that in the face of the Divine Other, the *walī* loses all personhood. As al-Kharrāz explains, this Beloved of God is as though gazing directly upon God, and thereby arrives at a state of ecstasy (*wajd*); [273] at this stage, nothing of his own intellect remains; he has no knowledge, no reason, no will, no senses. As al-Kharrāz further explains,

> When one of them [in such a state] is asked, "What do you want?" he responds "God"; and when asked, "What do you know?" he replies, "God;" and if his limbs could speak, they would say, "God," for his limbs and his joints are full with the light of God. He knows nothing but God, for all his knowledge is of God; he is of God, by God, for God, and with God; all [awareness] of his identity and ancestry

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Ashʿarī school), and having sympathies with Sufism. These sciences (exoteric and esoteric) are often integrated in his work. For his thought, I refer to his epistle on Sufism and his Qur'ānic exegesis. Abū al-Qāsim ʿAbd al-Karīm Al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah al-Qushayrīyyah*, ed. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd and Maḥmūd Ibn Sharīf (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif: n.d.); Abū al-Qāsim ʿAbd al-Karīm Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Basyūnī (Cairo: al-Hay'at al-Maṣriyyah al-ʿĀmiyyah li'l-Kutub, 2000). On the scholar, see Martin Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur'ān Scholar: Abū'l-Qāsīm al-Qushayrī and the Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt* (London: Oxford University Press & the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2012); see also the articles collected in *Al-Qushayrī and His Legacy*, *Journal of Sufi Studies* 2, no. 1 (2013): 1-120.

[273] *Wajd* denotes "being/existing," but also "finding," and the Ṣūfī tradition plays on both meanings, for the subject experiences Divine Reality (*wujūd*) in this state, but also "finds" Divinity. This may present with uttering what to the commoner, sounds blasphemous, such as explicitly identifying with divinity. Examples include one exclaiming the phrase, "Glory be to Me," in this state of ecstasy. Alternatively, *wajd* can result in (generally but not always) temporary loss of self-control so that one displays disregard for propriety. Such behavior became something of a trope in Sufi discourse, with a wide variety of attitudes towards *wajd*. We will have opportunity to study the famous case of al-Ḥallāj in the next chapter. Al-Sarrāj discusses the various types of ecstasy (genuine and otherwise) in his work; see, *Kitāb al-Lumāʿ*, 301-14. For more on ecstatic Sufism, see Annabel Keeler, "Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī and Discussions about Intoxicated Sufism," in *Routledge Handbook on Sufism*, 46-62. On the phenomenon and legacy of ecstatic (and ostensibly blasphemous) utterances (*shaṭaḥāt*), the most useful work remains Carl Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (New York: Suny Press, 1985).

> has gone (*dhahabat nisbatuhu wa ḥasabuh*). When asked, "What are you?" he cannot even reply "I, myself" because of the dominion of God's secrets over him. Such is the reality of ecstasy (*wajd*). When he arrives at the zenith of proximity [with God], he can no longer say even God.[274]

For al-Kharrāz, this encounter between the *wālī* and God is so powerful that it obliterates any distinction between the two, so that the Divine Other is no longer perceived by the *walī* as an other.

We should note that al-Kharrāz is not simply reporting what has been relayed to him by others; rather, he writes from direct experience. He expresses the sheer ineffability of self-annihilation, describing in the first person, the challenges of communicating his experience:

> …I do not know what I desire nor what I say nor who I am nor from where I am. O you who listens, do you understand what I say to you? It is a slave who has lost his name—he no longer has a name; he has become ignorant and no longer possesses any knowledge—but yet he has knowledge and yet he is not ignorant […] Oh, how I long for one who recognizes what I say and together with me enters into what I say.[275]

With this, and throughout his work, al-Kharrāz inserts himself into an exclusive group of God's intimates; few are those who have experiential knowledge of what he speaks, and he yearns for the companionship of those who have a share in such intimacy with God, who would intuitively understand what his words most assuredly fail to describe. *Wilāyah* is thus made to be the preserve of an exclusive few who are set apart from the rest of humanity, and this writer happens to be among those few. Al-Kharrāz's Bahgdadī contemporary scholar, al-Junayd (d. 298/910), also speaks of a self-effacement

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[274] Al-Kharrāz, *Kitāb al-Ṣafā'*, in *Rasā'il al-Kharrāz*, 179-180; cf. the translation in Göran Ogén, "Religious Ecstasy in Classical Sufism," in *Religious Ecstasy Based on papers Read at the Symposium on Religious Ecstasy Held at Åbo, Finland, on the 26th-28th of August 1981* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1982), 234.
[275] Al-Kharrāz, *Rasā'il*, 170; cf. Ogén, "Religious Ecstasy in Classical Sufism," 234.

experienced by the *Awliyā'* (himself included), whereby the Friend's subjectivity is dissolved in the face of God; on his own experience, he states enigmatically, "it was my being present which caused my absence,"[276] Abdel-Kader's translation gets us closer to what al-Junayd means: "it was my presence *with Him* which was the cause of my absence (from this world)."[277] Importantly, al-Junayd emphasizes that this state is followed by a state of self-awareness after this annihilation (*fanā*), a point which the traditional-religious literature highlights to demonstrate the disciplined nature of al-Junayd's school.[278] On this, al-Junayd writes,

> He is himself, after he has not been [truly] himself. He is present in himself and in God after having been present in God and absent in himself. This is because he has left the intoxication (*sakrah*) of God's overwhelming [him] and comes to the clarity of sobriety (*ṣaḥw*), and contemplation is once more restored to him so that he can put everything in its right place and assess it correctly. Once more he assumes his individual attributes, after self-annihilation (*fanā*). His personal qualities persist in him and his actions in this world. When he has reached the zenith of spiritual achievement vouchsafed by God, he becomes a pattern for humankind to follow.[279]

For al-Junayd, the Friend of God who experiences annihilation subsequently *regains* his senses and subjectivity. However, this *walī* is nonetheless irreversibly transformed by the experience. In this renewed existence, he now acts as an instrument of God on earth, guiding others to the Divine. For both al-Kharrāz and al-Junayd, these individuals do not simply speak on God's behalf; instead, God Himself speaks through them, for they are now devoid of self-interest; they can now guide humanity absent of any self-regard, in accord with the famous *Ḥadīth* of Union.

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[276] Al-Junayd, in Abdel-Kader, *Junayd*, Arabic 41.
[277] Abdel-Kader, *Junayd*, English 152, emphasis added. Note that "with Him" does not appear in the original Arabic, though it is an obvious and appropriate interpolation, given the context.
[278] See Ohlander, "al-Junayd al-Baghdādī: Chief of the Sect," 37-38.
[279] Abdel-Kader, *Junayd*, Arabic 41-42; English 172. My translation is adapted from that in Abdel-Kader, with adjustments.

4.1.1 Hierarchical Differentiation Among the Awliyā'

As we saw in the previous chapter, within the first centuries of Islam, several traditions were attributed to the Prophet which attested to the presence of a privileged group among the *Awliyā'*, including the Substitutes (*abdāl*) and company, the latter who eventually became saints on whose behalf God delays His punishment of humanity and the commencement of the Last Day. It was established that the earliest traditions on the Substitutes date to the end of the first Islamic century, and that these early traditions did not reflect later traditions on their functions on earth. Instead, earlier transmitters figured the Substitutes in a localized context of the civil war between Iraq and Syria soon after the Prophet's death. It is not until the time of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) that we find traditions which speak of the *abdāl* as having theurgical functions. Given the later date of such traditions, they no doubt reflect intellectual developments at the time of, and shortly preceding their circulation. Analysis of Ṣūfī works from this period reveals an inchoate hierarchical differentiation among the saints which was corroborated in this literary genre as well.

With an arsenal of traditions on elite ranks among the *Awliyā'* at their disposal, Ṣūfī writers were prepared to further elaborate on the reality, and nature of an existing spiritual hierarchy.[280] These traditions emboldened Ṣūfī authorities to further speculate on the nature of the saintly hierarchy. For example, the pioneering Ṣūfī exegete al-Tustari (d. 283/896), in his commentary on the Qur'ān, acknowledges a certain number of Substitutes (*abdāl*) and Stakes (*awtād*) existing within the spiritual hierarchy, and also specifies a category of *ṣiddīqūn*, "voracious ones," along with them (recall that we also

[280] Al-Junayd is a notable exception, whose thought shows no *systematized* hierarchical differentiation among the *awliyā'*; see Karamustafa, "Wilāyah according to al-Junayd," 66-67.

saw al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī transmitting traditions on the so-called "Voracious Ones"). Further, he attests to having met a great many of these spiritual elite, including "one thousand five hundred Veracious [servants of God] (*ṣiddīqūn*), among whom were forty Substitutes (*abdāl*) and seven Mainstays (*awtād*)."[281] With this, al-Tustarī affirms that such personalities not only exist but are also identifiable, and implicitly invites us to seek them out. Not only that, his own testimony to having met these figures also gives clearer order to the hierarchy which is absent from the early traditions; the progressively declining numbers in each rank which he has had the pleasure of meeting clearly suggest the Voracious are below the Substitutes, who themselves are below the Stakes (in his typology).

Sure enough, al-Tustarī argues that the Stakes (*awtād*) outrank the Substitutes (*abdāl*) because the former are firmly established at the end of the spiritual journey and so their spiritual condition is permanent, whereas the Substitutes might move from spiritual condition (*ḥāl*) to condition.[282] There is an understandable logic to his argument; al-Tustarī is engaging the linguistic possibilities in the terms he has inherited from the traditions, for like the pegs of a tent, the Stakes are stable (and also *stabilizing*), immovable, where as the "Substitutes," naturally, are replaceable, impermanent in nature. Recall that earlier traditions play on the meaning of "substitute" to suggest that whenever one of the *abdāl* passes, he is to be replaced by another;[283] in the earlier imagining, the

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[281] Anabel Keeler (trans.), *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, 90 (retained here with minor adjustments); al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, 77. Al-Tustarī is commenting on Q 10:62, a favorite verse for the justification of *wilāyah*. Cf. al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Lumāʿ*, 3, citing the same verse; al-Sarrāj also cites as justification for a special elect among God's servants, Qur'ān 27:59, which partly reads, "Praise be to God, and peace be upon those servants of His whom He has chosen." Less convincingly, he also cites Q 57:21, which reads in the context of God's forgiveness and paradise, "that is the bounty of God which He grants to whomever He wills."
[282] Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 77.
[283] Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 896, p. 2:231.

badl remains in his place until he dies. However, al-Tustarī speculates further to state that the term also suggests a temporary spiritual state, connecting the *ḥadīth* to a wider Ṣūfī tradition of demarcating various stages on the spiritual path, and differentiating between temporary or instant states (*ḥāl*, pl. *aḥwāl*) and those "stations" (*maqām*) of the path which have a degree of fixity to them.[284] For al-Tustarī, essential as the *abdāl* might be, their state is nonetheless a *ḥāl* from which one can descend, unlike that of the *awtād* (Stakes).

Like al-Tustarī, the renowned Ṣūfī theologian and exegete, Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (376/986-465/1072), confirms the indispensable nature of those positioned at the top of the hierarchy. Where the Qur'an speaks of the glory of God with ostensible reference to how God stabilizes the earth with mountains (e.g., Q 27:61), al-Qushayrī offers that these "mountains" allude to the Substitutes and the Stakes among humankind, they being "the succor of [all] creation,"[285] by whose virtue humanity is protected from calamity.[286] When this spiritual institution falls and the Saints cease to be, this will signal the commencement of the Day of Judgment.[287] Al-Qushayrī is not clear on which group sits at the top of the hierarchy between the Stakes and the Substitutes, yet the fact remains that these two groups represent the most superior of the Friends of God. Moreover, as with al-Tustarī, they are identifiable, at least by some. Thus, in his *Epistle* (*Risālah*) on Ṣūfīsm, al-Qushayrī includes a tradition wherein an earlier ascetic (Fatḥ al-Mawṣilī, d.

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[284] On this tradition, see Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 303-309. The idea in its mature form came to be that the *ḥāl* is instantaneous, and if not that, is characterized by its passing nature (such as a bout of ecstasy, or ineffable delight in God, or unspeakable dread) and may come upon the sojourner at any point, regardless of her current *maqām*; the *maqāms* on the other hand, are comparable to waystations one progressively passes on the path; they have a fixity to them in that the sojourner remains at each *maqām* for a time until she has cultivated what is required to progress beyond it.
[285] Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt*, 3:129.
[286] Al-Qusharyī, *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt*, 3:44.
[287] See al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt*, 2:99, 2:289, 3:44.

227/841) recounts that over the course of his life, he became acquainted with thirty individuals who he identified as being among the *abdāl*.[288]

Many Ṣūfī writers would seem to encourage a quest for the recognition of a chief among the Saints who stands above the rest. Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī argues that just as God has favored some prophets over others, which He often demonstrates via their miracles (e.g., Jesus' unique ability to raise the dead), so too has He favored some Friends over others, and conferred upon them their own unique duties appropriate to their ranks.[289] Sitting at the highest position as the chief of the *Awliyā'* is the one who possesses the so-called "Seal of Friendship with God," with the other Friends "behind him and below him, one rank after the other, while the stations (*manāzil*) of the prophets are similarly ordered in front of him."[290] For al-Tirmidhī, the Seal of the Saints corresponds to the Seal of Prophethood carried by the Prophet Muḥammad. While there is a distinction between Sainthood and Prophethood, both ranks nonetheless share in a running continuum of intimacy with God, as corroborated by al-Kharrāz (d. ca. 286/899), who also has it that prophethood is as though a promotion in rank from sainthood; as he explains, the prophets were, prior to their prophethood, saints, then God increased them in stature, making them prophets in addition to their being saints.[291] For

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[288] Al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*, 2:580.
[289] E.g., Radtke and O'Kane, *Concept of Sainthood*, 101.
[290] Radtke and O'Kane, *Concept of Sainthood*, 109; as far as we know, discussion on the "Seal" of the *awliyā'* is peculiar to al-Tirmidhī in this period. For more on al-Tirmidhī's "seal," see al-Tirmidhī's discussion and the editors' commentary in Radtke and O'Kane, 97, 101, and *passim*; also, Sviri, *Perspectives on Early Islamic Mysticism*, 217-236. Later, the notion of a Seal of the Friends is elaborated by the influential mystic and theologian, Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240). See Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn ʿArabi* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993). Also, note that al-Tirmidhī's "*manāzil*" corresponds conceptually to the spiritual waystations (*maqāmāt*) discussed above.
[291] Al-Kharrāz, *Rasā'il*, 189. This is also suggested by the 5th/11th century Ashʿarī theologian, al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), who includes among the proofs of *karāmāt*, the portents surrounding the Prophet Muḥammad's birth which, as he observes, were all *prior* to his prophethood. Such portents, he suggests, correspond to his being a *walī* in his pre-prophetic period; al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, 255.

al-Tirmidhī, the Seal occupies the subtle space between the two ranks. Since sainthood is in some way an emanation from prophethood, he can argue that there are some Friends whom God has given "a third of prophethood, while others have been given a half and others still have been given more." The Seal however, being the most perfect of the saints, "is the most highly endowed" with respect to having a share of prophethood.[292]

Indeed, the Seal of the Saints stands at the nexus between Friendship (*wilāyah*) and Prophethood (*nubuwwah*), so close to the latter that "he has almost attained their status."[293] This corresponds to al-Tirmidhī's thesis on how the Prophet operates as the "Seal of the prophets;" for him, this has not to do with Muḥammad being the last prophet (in opposition to the dominant understanding of this title for the Prophet), but rather, with his being the most *perfect* of prophets. He is the "seal" in the sense of a "stamp" perfectly presenting a pattern; he is a most perfect model to be followed, in which all aspects of prophethood are gathered.[294] With this established, al-Tirmidhī can now present the Seal of the Saints in a manner that harkens back to the Seal of the Prophets, and so he deliberately figures the saintly Seal in ways which echo mythic depictions of the Prophet. As chief among the *Awliyā'*, the Seal is the first of the Saints that God thought of in the primal beginning, the first of the Saints to be willed into existence prior to the

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[292] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 113-14; in response to his student's hesitation that anyone should have a "share" of prophethood, the master cites an alleged prophetic tradition in which the Prophet states that "adopting a middle course, right guidance and virtuous behavior constitute one portion of the twenty-four portions of prophethood." Should such individuals have a 24th of prophethood, how much more for the Friends of God? By presenting and responding to this concern, al-Tirmidhī is preempting a particular attack from his detractors, that his *walī* is dangerously close to the prophets; we will return to this concern in the next chapter. For the text of the prophetic *ḥadīth*, see al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Sīrat al-Awliyā'*, §69, p47. It is also cited in the author's *Nawādir*, 2:128. It appears in the *Musnad* of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, along with various other collections. See Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 4:432-433 (see also the editor's comments for a thorough documentation of its spread throughout the *ḥadīth* literature)

[293] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 130.

[294] See O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 106-107, where al-Tirmidhī rails against those who interpret the Prophet's "seal" as purely a reference to his being the last of prophets: theirs is "an interpretation of stupid people and fools."

manifestation of humans in embodied form, the first of the Saints whom God addressed among humankind, and the first of them to be raised for Resurrection. Even in the here and now, the Seal, we are told, is brought to God's very presence in the Realm of (God's) Sovereignty (*mulk al-mulk*), so that he experiences unique conversation with God. To be sure, all of the *Awliyā'* enjoy intimate discourse with God at some level, and accordingly, some of them beyond the Seal are bestowed such intimate discourse that they are recognized as *muḥaddathūn* (lit. "those spoken to"); these *muḥaddathūn* enjoy permission to frequent the assemblies of God "without the presence of a veil," that is, without an intermediary.[295] However, al-Tirmidhī has it that the intimacy between the Seal and God is a category onto its own, for the Seal, having come into "the grasp (*qabḍ*) [of God], *remains* in this most magnificent assembly (*al-majlis al-aʿẓam*)."[296]

Analogous to al-Tirmidhī's "Seal" is al-Tustarī's "proof of God," [297] that singular individual whose presence most arouses awareness of God, whose presence irrefutably reflects the reality of God. There is also talk in the Ṣūfī tradition of the Axis or Pole, *quṭb*, i.e., "he around which the millstone of the world turns."[298] Though it is al-Tustarī

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[295] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 86, cf. 115.

[296] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 64, emphasis added; notably, much of the language used in his description of the Seal parallels that used in describing many of the honors he lists for the Prophet. The Prophet's distinction lies in his being raised above *all* humankind (the Friends included); he is the first to arise in God's thinking, the first to be raised up on the Day of Resurrection, and the first to practice intercession on behalf of the believers. The Seal's share in these honors is that wherever he has the honor of precedence, he is "first" simply among the *awliyā*, their being *after* the prophets in rank. Perhaps the most important analog here is that honor of intercession (*shafāʿah*). Though the doctrine of the Prophet's special honor of intercession with God on behalf of the Believers on the Day of Judgment becomes firmly established in Sunnī thought by the 3rd/9th century, it is evidently an early doctrine tracing at least to the 1st/7th century, given its attestation on the Dome of the Rock, completed in 72/691. On the early development of the theory of Muhammad's intercession, see Feras Hamza, "To Hell and Back: A Study of the Concepts of Hell and Intercession in Early Islam," PhD diss. (University of Oxford, 2002), 120-150. On how this is associated with a belief in temporary suffering in hell for sinful believers and their eventual salvation, see Feras Hamza, "Temporary Hellfire and Punishment and the Making of Sunnī Orthodoxy," in *Roads to Paradise: Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam*, eds. Sebastian Gunther and Todd Lawson (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 1:371-406.

[297] Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr*, 77. I discuss the significance of this claim later in the conclusion to this chapter.

[298] Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr*, 77.

that is said to have identified himself as the Proof of God, it is his students who confer upon him the tile of the Pole. On this, the student writes, "if we were to include him (al-Tustarī) among the Stakes, then we would say that *he* was the *quṭb* (Pole) around which the world turns."[299] Later, the great scholar, Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021),[300] writes of the *quṭb*:

> Should one of the saints disclosed (to humankind) err, by a slight or a word—and he could not err beyond this—the (concealed saint) would return him to the straight way. He would either reveal himself to him and restore him to rectitude or befriend him, while remaining veiled, and restore him to equilibrium by [the authority of] his inner qualities. There shall always be a Pole (*quṭb*) among the saints watching over them all. The Pole restores anyone of them who swerves from the Truth (*al-Ḥaqq*, [i.e., God]), to His path by either his inner qualities or the overwhelming nature of his authority."[301]

As is clear, al-Sulamī has it that the Pole is generally concealed from commonfolk, though he might reveal himself to the saints below him as necessary for rectification. One gets the sense that the chief among the Friends has fully arrived at the destination, so that at any given moment, when he speaks, he does so while in unification with God; it is as though God speaks.[302]

The characterization of that who stands as master to the saints, no matter the epithet, is unfailingly mythic in nature. Not only does the world and all that is contained

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[299] Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr,* 89. Medieval Sufism would go on to elaborate on the important functions of the *quṭb* in maintaining the cosmos. See P Kunitzsch and F. de Jong "Kutb" in *The Enyclopaedia of Islam,* 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 5:542-546.

[300] On whose life and legacy, see Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 125-127; Gerhard Böwering, "The Qur'ān Commentary of al-Sulamī," in *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J. Adams*, eds. Wael b. Hallaq and Donald P. Little (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 41-56; Jawid A. Mojaddedi, *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism: The Ṭabaqāt Genre from al-Sulamī to Jāmī* (London: Routledge, 2001), 9-39.

[301] Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Al-Sulamī, *Mas'alat Darajāt al-Ṣādiqīn fī al-Taṣawwuf*, ed. Kenneth Honerkamp, in *Majmūʿat-ī Āthār Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī*, ed. N. Purjavādī (Tehran: Markaz-I Nashr-I Danishgāhi, 1990), 87; my translation modifies that in Kenneth Honerkam, "A Sufi Itinerary of Tenth Century Nishapur Based on a Treatise by Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 17, no. 1 (2006), 64.

[302] Compare this to al-Tustari's claim that "For thirty years I have been speaking to God while people imagine that I'm speaking to them." Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr*, 104.

within metaphorically turn on the Pole's "axis," the Pole's existence also ensures the continuation of sainthood as an institution in the universe, providing access to the divine for the rest of humankind. And even on the Day of Judgment, as al-Tirmidhī explains, the Seal will come to intercede for us with God.[303] We can easily imagine how such discourse might inspire the glorification of certain individuals hailed as accomplished Saints, and this is evident already in how al-Tustarī's disciple-scribe figures his master, postulating that he very well might be one of the Stakes, and the Pole among them at that (and perhaps, this was not far from al-Tustarī's impression of his own merits, considering himself *the* Proof of God). Indeed, it is clear that this disciple's attachment to al-Tustarī is informed in large part by his perception of al-Tustarī's singular intimacy with God. As one comes to accept that there are those who have a unique relationship with God above all others, for whose sake God graces humanity, a natural consequence of this belief is to seek to identify such individuals, and then ideally, to submit to the teachings and authority of such persons.

4.2 The *Awliyā'* in Competition for Authority

Though there is a specific honor for those who stand above all the saints, they all share in acting as the primary agents of God on earth. As Sviri explains in her study on the intellectual world of al-Tirmidhī, the *ḥadīth al-nawāfil* on God's union with the *walī* empowered Ṣūfīs to conceive of every saying and deed of the *walī* as a "synergetic act of God and *walī* in tandem."[304] By characterizing the Friends as inheritors of prophetic intimacy with God, Ṣūfīs make the case for a unique authority which they command on

[303] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 107. Once again, the Seal of Friendship is made to echo the Seal of Prophethood.
[304] Sviri, *Perspectives on Early Islamic Mysticism*, 227.

earth. The *walī*-Prophet parallel advances the view that like prophets, the *Awliyā'* are, in the words of al-Tirmidhī (d. ca. 295-300/907-912), "God's men on His earth, the defenders of His affair;"[305] and like prophets, they are endowed with spiritual authority above creation. No one opposes them except that they are met with divine retribution.[306] As the perfected Friend becomes "completely engaged with God to the exclusion of all else," he becomes one of God's "trusted agents," "a fully authorized deputy who does not need permission," for whatever task he performs, he does so in the grasp of God.[307] The *Awliyā'* then, are imbued with a knowledge which goes beyond the discursive sort associated with the jurists, theologians, and more broadly, scholars of received knowledge, for the knowledge of the *Awliyā'* comes directly from the Divine. As al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988) explains, it is the *Awliyā'* who are the "repositories of His [i.e, God's] secrets and knowledge."[308] Further, the preserve of the *Awliyā'* is their penetrating insight into realities, a gift not shared by those engaged in other respected scholarly pursuits (to the exclusion of mysticism).[309] For al-Tirmidhī, God "binds" certain elect among the *Awliyā'* to Himself through His divine intellect, [310] and the result is that the special elect among the *Awliyā'* inherit all "the knowledge which the prophets and the Friends possess," including knowledge of "God's ordering of the world."[311] In other words, they have a prescient knowledge of ongoings in the world, material and immaterial, of the divine teleology in creation. And, while knowledge of God for others is attained through

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[305] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 144.
[306] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 125.
[307] Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Sīrat al-Awliyā'*, §48, p. 39-40; cf. the translation in Radtke and O'Kane, *The Concept of Sainthood*, 91. See also Sviri's treatment of this section in *Perspectives on Early Islamic Mysticism*, 227.
[308] Al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 3.
[309] Al-Sarrāj, *Kitab al-Lumaʿ*, 10-11.
[310] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 91.
[311] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 86.

ratiocination, textual study, and inherited tradition, the Friend attains *direct* knowledge of God, for "the Friend of God understands through God."[312] As such, the Friend is best equipped to lead others to God. Al-Junayd speaks of the true scholars as above all, the learned *Awliyā'*; and because of their experience of God,

> God has made them unfurled flags of truth, lighthouses erected for guidance, …theirs is the light which leads in the darkness of ignorance…God has made them the symbol of His mercy for His creatures, and a blessing for whom He chooses. They are the instruments whereby He instructs the ignorant, reminds the negligent, guides the seeker aright...He who follows in their footsteps is guided on the right path, he who follows their mode of life will be happy and never depressed.[313]

With this, like his colleagues, al-Junayd instructs that his audience need look no further than the learned *Awliyā'* for spiritual guidance.

4.2.1 Spirituality as Chief of the Disciplines

Of our sources, al-Tirmidhī addresses detractors most vociferously, and the stridently defensive tone in his polemic is demonstrative of his investment in silencing the apparently formidable criticisms of his detractors. His tone betrays an existing controversy surrounding Ṣūfī claims about their *wilāyah*, as there is a conspicuous concern to persuade the reader that those who reject the *walī's* authority have no ground to stand on. al-Timirdhī insists that one should take care not to dismiss the divine inspiration (*ilhām*) which is "interjected by God" into the heart of the *walī*,[314] and cautions that "the person who hears supernatural speech [*ḥadīth*] is too important [for] his

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[312] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 148.
[313] Al-Junayd, in Abdel-Kader, Arabic 23; English 143 (retained here).
[314] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 139. *Ilhām* is a type of inspired knowledge recognized by virtually all Sufī authors and is typically figured as the parallel to the revelation (*waḥy*) God inspires in prophets; see e.g., al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 35; al-Qushayrī, recognizes an *ilhām* which is inspired by an angel, and a greater *ilhām* which comes directly from God; see al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah*, 1:197-198.

speech to be despised."[315] One who disregards the counsel of the Friends, or even harbors ill feeling for them, does so only to one's peril. Moreover, because the marvels (*karāmāt*) wrought by the Friends inspired such wonder, they became the most visible sign of *wilāyah*, and an object of attack for those who sought to limit the influence of their defenders, most notably, scholars affiliated with the Muʿtazilite school of theology (as I discuss in the following chapter). It is for this reason that deniers of *karāmāt* are routinely denigrated as scholars of the "outward" (*al-ẓāhir*) sciences, a dog whistle for scholars who rely purely on discursive reasoning so that, in the eyes of the mystics, their scholarship does not go beyond the surface (i.e., the "outward"). They are therefore inept in the discipline of mastering the spirit, which, Ṣūfī writers plead consistently, is the purview of the *Awliyā'*.

True enough, al-Tirmidhī concedes, saintly inspiration (*ilhām*) from God must be properly distinguished from the Revelation (*waḥy*) which prophets receive. Unlike the teachings of prophets, those of the Friends are not binding upon the Believer. It is prophets alone that carry and convey Revelation proper, which humans are obliged to accept, barring which, one necessarily falls outside of the community of Believers.[316] On the other hand, the inspiration which saints receive is not Scripture proper, and indeed,

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[315] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 121. On heeding those who receive supernatural speech, he cites a report with two different chains of narration wherein the Prophet states, "there are people in the [different] religious communities who were spoken to without being prophets. If one of them ever existed within my community, it was ʿUmar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb," (the second Caliph after the Prophet Muḥammad). Not unreasonably, al-Tirmidhī glosses "were spoken to" as a reference to direct speech from God. This *ḥadith* itself is widely reported from the 3rd/9th century onwards in various canonical compilations, with minor differences in the chains, including that of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), Muslim Ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Naysābūrī (d. 261/875), Muḥammad Ibn ʿIsā al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892), Aḥmad ibn Shuʿayb al-Nasā'ī (d. 303/915), Muḥammad Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/965) and others. See the editor's commentary in the cited edition of Ibn Ḥanbal's text for details on the spread of this tradition; Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), *Musnad Aḥmad*, 40:329-330.

[316] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 111.

must be judged against prophetic scripture. There is no risk of excommunication for rejecting one's claim to sainthood (even if the claim be true). But, as is consistently argued, the true Saints never act in contravention of prophetic guidelines.[317] Further, just as the prophets edify humankind through their revelation, the Friends also call others to God, not just by way of prophetic Revelation, but also their own personal communications with God. Lastly, as discussed above, al-Tirmidhī promises a grim fate for one who rejects the claims of true saints; anyone who does so "will suffer failure and undergo evil consequences, and his heart will be confounded."[318] Thus, despite the important distinctions recognized between prophetic and saintly authority, the end result for al-Tirmidhī is that those who act in accordance with what is due to the Saints recognize their teachings as coming from God and consequently submit to them; in actuality then, the role that the Friends should play in ordering one's life differs very little from that of the Prophet.

4.2.2 Addressing Ṣūfī Arrogance and Heresy

Many defenders of *karāmāt* suggest that their detractors are motivated by jealousy of the *Awliyā'*: by admitting spiritual gifts for the *Awliyā'*, especially their miracles (*karāmāt*), one admits for them a unique status not accessible to those who have not attained *wilāyah.* The detractors would then have to accept a precedence for those identified as *Awliyā'* over themselves, and this, Ṣūfīs accuse, is precisely the source of their reluctance. As al-Tirmidhī explains, his opponents, especially those who deny the *karāmāt* of the Friends, simply "cannot bear that someone be set over them as a leader."[319] Al-

[317] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 118, 121.
[318]O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 133; cf. O'Kane and Radtke, 119.
[319] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 155.

Tirmidhī further argues that these individuals only feign concern for the religion in their objections, for they are in point of fact, self-possessed, worldly scholars, ridden with jealousy for the *Awliyā'*. One who belongs to this group "loves the world and yet hides this love" and "displays renunciation outwardly but is caught up in self-love."[320] It is their anger and jealousy that arouses in them disdain for the Friends of God, and makes them instead, friends of "falsity and heresy."[321] Little do they know that "whoever contends with them [the *Awliyā'*] is cast down and comes to an evil end."[322]

Given that his work aims at celebrating the noble qualities of the Friends, the surprisingly acerbic tone in al-Tirmidhī's invective against his opponents is acknowledged by the author himself. In the tongue of his hypothetical student-interlocutor, he presents what the reader might have to say about this:

> Whenever you happen to mention someone from those groups whose teachings you reject, you become filled with fervor against them and you treat them harshly in your speech, as if your sense of mercy has dried up where they are concerned. Why is this the case?[323]

Al-Tirmidhī shows appreciation for the question, and cannot but confirm the observation; in response, he states that he is simply displaying the anger that is due to those who would be so bold as to reject the spiritual virtues of God's Friends; besides, such an individual "is not bothered by the abuse he does to his own soul," and by his misleading others; how then,

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[320] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 164. So too for the Sunnī theologian, Abū Manṣur ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037): "They [rejectors of *karāmāt*] did not find any one among their heretics to possess *karāmah*, so they rejected what was forbidden to them due to the evil of their heresy," Abū Manṣūr ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, ed. Aḥmad Shams al-Dīn (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2002), 198. Al-Tirmidhī's admission that detractors presented outwardly as pietists is perhaps a nod to the shared ascetic origins between Sufism and Muʿtazilite thought. On this thesis of ascetic origins for the Muʿtazilah, see Sobieroj, "The Muʿtazila and Sufism," 68-92.
[321] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 164.
[322] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 125. See also Bernd Radtke, "al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī on miracles," in *Miracles et karāma*, ed. Denise Aigle (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2000), 290-291.
[323] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 188.

al-Tirmidhī asks, can one be expected to be gentle with this folk?[324] Strategically, he claims to model his attitude on the polarity found in God Himself who first approaches all human beings with mercy, but eventually, He meets those who intransigently reject Him with His severity.[325] As is clear from the foregoing discussion, al-Tirmidhī explicitly links recognition of *karāmāt* with recognition of the authority appropriate to the *walī*. Plainly, the *Awliyā'* should be heeded with more regard than the scholars of the exoteric sciences, as made evident by their marvels, and their embittered opponents who reject the *karāmāt* simply conceal their resentment of the *Awliyā'* placed above them.

Ṣūfī authors on the *Awliyā'* were also clearly aware of the objection that claimants to saintly authority, who thereby affirm their unique proximity to God, might become unduly confident of their salvation of God, and further, this might arouse in them a spiritual arrogance. Moreover, self-proclaimed *Awliyā'* might argue that once they have "arrived" at God, they may freely abstain from religious rituals and duties (a heresy that would be unacceptable to all parties). After all, the purpose of ritual worship, for example, is that humans be drawn to God, so one might ask, how does worship serve someone who has already attained its purpose? Some of our writers register this concern even among their own theological companions; for example, al-Qushayrī notes that a fellow Ashʿarī theologian, Abū Bakr Ibn Fūrak (d. 406/1015) opined that it is not possible for the *walī* to know of his status, for that would obviate any fear of divine punishment, and would result in a sense of security (*amn*) in the hereafter, both of which are inappropriate for the servant of God (the idea being that a certain amount of fear is

[324] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 195.
[325] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 189-190.

necessary for remaining on even keel, spiritually).[326] So too, al-Kalābādhī (d. 380s/990s) speaks of "some" who held this position, not mentioning any by name. Yet, al-Kalābādhī, like most of our scholars, associates the affirming position with the "greatest and most venerable scholars."[327]

Al-Tirmidhī confidently affirms that the *walī* might indeed come to know of his salvation in the hereafter, for the *Awliyā'* receive glad tidings (*bushrā*) in this world in the form of a God-inspired peace and serenity concerning their fate.[328] Yet, he explains, the *Awliyā'*, "those whom God…has caused to reach Him, and those from whose carnal souls deceits have disappeared and whose lusts have died and whose hearts live in God," cannot be harmed by their confidence in their salvation.[329] How could one be when he has been transformed by God?[330] Al-Tirmidhī thus rests on the perfected nature of the saint to render backsliding on the part of the true *walī* as inadmissible. As he understands it, the Friend of God is completely absorbed with God, having no regard for any other, let alone himself, so that any interest in satisfying the self is precluded. As al-Tirmidhī explains, the moment the saint is "protected from regarding his own self," he can be conscious of his own sainthood and see it affirmed, particularly through miracles and other gifts.[331] For al-Qushayrī, this confidence is simply one of the possible marvels bestowed on the saints: "it is possible for the *karāmāt* of a *walī* to include his knowledge

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[326] Al-Qusharyī, *al-Risālah*, 2:521.
[327] Al-Kalābādhī, *al-Taʿarruf*, 161.
[328] This God-inspired peace can come in different ways; Al-Tirmidhī has it that there are numerous Friends who receive such glad tidings in dreams, while there only a handful who receive such tidings in one's heart while awake; O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 135-136.
[329] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 165.
[330] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 141; here again is another reference to the *Ḥadīth* of Union.
[331] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 74. On al-Tirmidhī's typology of miracles, see Berndt [sic] Radtke, al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī on Miracles, in *Miracle et Karāma. Hagiographies médiévales compares*, ed. Denise Aigle (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2000), 287-299.

that he is secured a goodly outcome [in the Hereafter]."[332] Likewise, Abu Bakr Kalābādhī (d. 380s/990s) agrees that the saints may receive a God-inspired peace which thus testifies to their special rank with God, both in this world and the next. He, like al-Qushayrī, adduces as evidence that the Prophet had (allegedly) informed some of his Companions of their secured place in Paradise, yet this did not affect their reverence for God.[333] Here, he relies on well-known traditions which show that some of the most renowned companions balanced their confidence in their salvific security with an imposing awe of God. Thus, al-Kalabādhī reports, the Companion and second Caliph ʿUmar reportedly stated, "would that I were a date pecked by birds," and "would that I were," like straw, "nothing." Likewise, the Companion, Abu Ubaydah, exclaimed, "I wish that I were a ram, and that my people would sacrifice me, and eat my flesh and sip my broth."[334] The intent behind these expressions is that the speakers, spiritually distinguished as they might be, would still rather lose their human existence altogether than face accountability before God on Judgment Day, for they were keenly aware that like all humans, they must necessarily fall short of God's due. With such traditions, al-Kalābādhī wants to safeguard the claim that saintly confidence of salvation does not conflict with God-reverence.

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[332] Al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah*, 2:525.

[333] Al-Kalābādhi, *al-Taʿarruf*, 162; al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah*, 2:522. Both are referring to a set of famous traditions which speak of the Prophet identifying ten Companions promised paradise. For the spread of this tradition, see the editor's comments in the cited edition of al-Kalābādhī's *al-Taʿarruf*, 162-163. For an analysis of the underlying polemics behind the tradition, see Maya Yazigi, "Ḥadīth al-ʿashara or the Political Uses of a Tradition," *Studia Islamica* 86, (1997): 159-167. Al-Kalābādhī also cites various traditions wherein the Prophet confirms salvation to various persons individually; see *al-Taʿarruf*, 167-179.

[334] Al-Kalābādhi, *al-Taʿarruf*, 165; here, I have mostly retained the translation found in Arberry, *Exposition*, 62. Both traditions are recorded already in the *al-Zuhd* of Ibn al-Mubārak (d. 181/797). See the editor's (al-Ṭayyib) comments in al-Kalābādhī, *al-Taʿarruf*, 165.

Nevertheless, most of our authors, al-Tirmidhī included, must admit that the Friends might commit some error unbefitting of *their* status (it's understood that what is expected of commonfolk is not the standard by which to judge the *Awliyā'*). They check this acknowledgement by resorting to the position that the *Awliyā'* are nonetheless, free of *grave* error. As al-Kalābādhī explains, the saint is protected from the faults of humanity, though "the stamp of humanity persists" within him.[335] In other words, for him, the Friend of God, though still at base a human being, is no longer subject to the common faults of human nature for God has declared to Satan, "Verily, you shall have no authority over my servants, except the deviant ones who follow you" (Q 15:42).[336] Thus, in arguing that miracles confirm to the saint his position with God, al-Kalābādhī states that such a saint will never succumb to the temptation of arrogance. Sainthood guarantees a divine protection (*ḥifẓ*) from reveling in sin. Time and again, this belief is reiterated in our texts, and is entangled with the conviction of the Friend's single-focused attachment to God. Like al-Kalābādhī, al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988) explains that having entered into the presence of God, the Friends have "no need of other than He, so that they choose Him over anything other…and cut themselves off from all but Him (*inqaṭaʿū ilayhi*)."[337] Consequently, they are not attracted to that which draws them away from God.

For al-Tirmidhī, while the saints might be susceptible to sin, they never *persist* in sin; whenever one of them slips, "every hair…cries out to God in remorse, every one of his veins groans to God in pain."[338] In a similar vein, al-Qushayrī (376/986-465/1072), states that though the Friends may display sin in the form of "a (trifle) defect, or

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[335] Al-Kalābādhī, *al-Taʿarruf*, 162.
[336] Al-Kalābādhī, *al-Taʿarruf*, 161-162.
[337] Al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 3.
[338] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 165.

wrongdoing or slippage," God nonetheless protects them from continuing in sin.[339] Accordingly, among the definitions of *walī* provided by al-Qushayrī is one whom God has befriended and placed under his care (*tawālī*), with God incessantly protecting His charge. He unceasingly assists His Friend against vice, so that the Friend does not experience the phenomenon of divine abandonment (*khidhlān*), whereby God leaves the woefully egregious to her devices, allowing her to go stray; instead, God constantly keeps the *walī* on the path of virtue.[340] In presenting his position, al-Qushayrī makes a brief note to establish a qualitative difference between the protection of prophets and that of saints. He posits a thoroughgoing protection for prophets, in that they are removed from *all* sin, and this, as standard Ashʿarī theology has it, is admitted into faith by necessity (*wujūban*).[341] In the Ashʿarī tradition to which al-Qushayrī belongs, it is argued that prophets must necessarily be morally unerring (*maʿṣūm*), given the conflicts that arise from the possibility of a sinful prophet whom God has held up as a model to be followed. The complications of prophetic inerrancy need not deter us here;[342] what is most pertinent to our discussion is the self-awareness that there is a clear parallel drawn between the Prophet and the *walī* such that even the spiritual protection each party receives from God must be discussed in tandem and properly differentiated. In sum, in speaking of God's protection over the *walī*, our writers assure that the saint's intimacy with God is secure,

[339] Al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah*, 2:524.
[340] Al-Qushayri, *al-Risālah*, 2:523
[341] Al-Qusharī, *al-Risālah*, 2:524
[342] The various positions in Sunnī and Shīʿī Islam concerning this question is digested in Robert Gleave, "Personal Piety," in *The Cambridge Companion to Muḥammad*, ed. Jonathan E. Brockopp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 117-120.

that his confidence in salvation need not conflict with reverence for God, and finally, that the saint remains ever the moral exemplar, despite the occasional slight.[343]

4.3 Conclusion

Ṣūfī polemics in support of the *Awliyā'* and their *karāmāt* arose as part of a mostly successful campaign for the prominence of the *Awliyā'* against opposition from the corners of some who did not partake in Ṣūfī discourse. Ṣūfīs were making a claim to their discipline as outranking that of others, and far from hiding themselves, many of them were seeking influence in their societies. This is evident in the noticeable "fence-sitting" on the part of our sources with respect to the value of seclusion.[344] Given awareness of the dangers which fame (and the desire for it) presents to the ego, and the contrasting claim that the *Awliyā'* are meant to lead humankind, many are stuck between advocating for their exposure to the public and taking the path of seclusion from public life. This also calls to mind the ambivalence in the early tradition concerning whether it is appropriate to earn one's livelihood or to abandon placing one's hopes in the "means," and instead, place one's hope in God completely. Both issues were often interlinked; on the one hand, given overwhelming received knowledge on the renunciant-reclusive practices of earlier forebearerers, the writers must praise those who take to complete seclusion (which no doubt represented a dominant current in early Islamic spirituality), and even speak of

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[343] Consider also al-Kalābādhī, who states plainly that the Friend is not, like the Prophet, inerrant (*maʿṣūm*), for the *walī* may yet fall into sin, major or minor; yet any such incident for the *walī* is always coupled with true and sincere repentance, and never does severe damage to his religion. See al-Kalābādhī, *al-Taʿarruf*, 162. There is also a more dissenting, perhaps anomalous view in the theology of the Ashʿarī scholar, ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī. As with our Sufi writers, he accepts the miracles of the Saints. Yet, he argues that while the prophets are protected from spiritual deviation and unbelief, the beneficiaries of *karāmah* (i.e., the *awliyā'*) cannot be assumed to be have such protection, not even from unbelief(!), for the spiritual state of any given *walī* may change (for the better or worse) even after receiving a *karāmah*; in other words, one who attains *wilāyah* might very well slip from that position, losing his *wilāyah* altogether. This view of course, severely limits one's perception of the security in following any individual taken to be a *walī*; See ʿAbd al-Qāhir Al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 199.

[344] Karamustafa, *The Formative Period*, 24.

partial seclusion and detachment from possessions as integral to the spiritual journey. Yet, they balance this with a rejection of censorious attitudes towards those who opt to earn a livelihood as opposed to resigning themselves to God's care. We may summarize the ambivalence by stating that many of our writers praise the act of (temporary or permanent) withdrawal (*ʿuzlah*) or seclusion (*khalwah*) without praising self-imposed poverty. Al-Sarrāj, for example, claims that the friends of God are withdrawn, cutting themselves of from all connections, fleeing creation and seeking companionship with Him alone.[345] Further, through the sayings of early masters, he provides support for the value in opting not to earn a livelihood and resigning oneself to God.[346] However, he also displays a reluctance toward rejecting work categorically, as exemplified in a comment attributed to Sahl al-Tustarī: Whosoever denounces earning a living (*al-iktisāb*) has surely denounced the [Prophet's] *sunnah*; and whosoever denounces reliance (*tawakkul*) on God has surely denounced Faith."[347] For al-Tustarī (according to this quote), it would be untenable to unconditionally advocate against earning a living, given that the Prophet himself is said to have worked as a tradesman in his youth. Yet, he clearly finds value in abandoning work as an expression of one's trust in God.

The place of mendicancy is further complicated by al-Sarrāj's three-stage typology of renunciants (*zuhd*): The first class comprises novices who free themselves of material possessions, thereby emptying their hearts of such things; the second class moves beyond the first by emptying themselves of the selfish interests involved in renunciation, namely, the societal praise that such a one accrues for his renunciation. Finally, the third class

[345] Al-Sarraj, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 3.
[346] Al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 195-199
[347] Al-Sarrāj, 195.

comprises those who fully recognize the world for what it is, completely devoid of any value, that even its renunciation is worthless.[348] Al-Sarrāj quotes al-Shiblī, an early forebearer, as explaining that since the world amounts to nothing, setting oneself upon the renunciation of that nothing is pure folly. This results in the teaching that those who obsess over imposing poverty on themselves are distracted from being occupied with God so that for the most advanced of the Friends, renunciation is neither here nor there when it comes to attaining intimacy with God.[349]

The reality on the ground however is that the careers of the most successful Ṣūfī exemplars from the third century onward does not correspond to this ambivalence. Most of these writers are public scholars, firmly rooted at the center, as opposed to the margins of their societies. The primary representatives of Baghdad Ṣūfīsm (including al-Junayd) notably participated in mainstream, urban social life.[350] And, by way of example, the famous Sahl al-Tustarī of Shushtar (in modern-day Iran), whom we referred to above, though initially leading a life of seclusion for two decades, later exited his seclusion to become a public figure with considerable renown.[351] Also, consider the reflections of al-Tirmidhī, himself active in Khorasan, who argues that the *walī* functions in the public, so that the laity can continue to draw from his guidance, which in the end, comes directly from the Divine. Thus, he categorically rejects the notion that the Friend of God should take to a self-imposed isolation or self-inflicted suffering in the interest of spiritual discipline. His theoretical student-interlocutor stands in for the naysayers, stating, “there

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[348] Al-Sarrāj, 46-47
[349] Al-Sarrāj, 196-197; A diversity of positions regarding detachment is also documented in al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah*, 1:239-244; compare this to his categorical praise for withdrawal as essential to the path, both for the initiate and for the one who has arrived. Al-Qushayrī, 1:222.
[350] Karamustafa, *The Formative Period,* 23.
[351] Karamustafa, *The Formative Period*, 39.

are those who say that the Friend of God cannot be seen…and that he is veiled beneath God's veil. Moreover…he eats grass and is pleased whenever he incurs some loss in the world. Nor does he speak to anyone."[352] Al-Tirmidhī treats these claims as hogwash. Such views, he states, are those of a "stupid man who has thought up a falsehood out of his own fantasy."[353] These are charlatans who merely *affect* Friendship of God.[354]

As opposed to relegating themselves to the periphery, Ṣūfīs came to be "major players in the on-going tug of war" among Muslim intellectuals for authority.[355] They staked their claim to spiritual knowledge direct from God, which escaped devotees of other disciplines who neglected the path of the Ṣūfīs. Thus, al-Tirmidhī explains that those jurists who restrict themselves to rituals and its study only stunt their progress toward God, having misplaced a vehicle for the destination. Al-Tirmidhī instructs his student (and by extension, the reader) to pay no mind to the objections of the law-obsessed critic (a reference to critical scholars of *sharīʿah*); after all, how "can he know his Lord while he finds reassurance in his works [i.e., rituals] which issue from his befouled limbs, from his turbid heart and from his ailing faith?"[356] This is as opposed to those who attain intimacy with God through spiritual discipline; it is they who can be turned to for proper application of the law, since what comes through them comes from God; "through their knowledge they guarantee the perfect interpretation and application of the *sharīʿa.*"[357] It is the *Awliyā'* who properly place things in balance, who study the exoteric sciences, while giving the spirit its due above

[352] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 127.
[353] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 127
[354] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 127.
[355] Karamustafa, *The Formative Period*, 40
[356] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 60.
[357] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 118. He adds that their knowledge "contains nothing which abrogates any part of the Holy Law, rather it is in full agreement with the latter. Indeed, whatever is contrary to the Holy Law is devilish enticement." See also Radtke, "al-Tirmidhī on Miracles," 291.

(and *not* in contradiction to) all else. Likewise, al-Sarrāj explains that the Ṣūfīs who "traverse the path of the pious *Awliyā'*" are superior to the others because they go beyond the exoteric sciences to study the inner reality (*ḥaqīqah*) of both the manifest (i.e., on the surface) and that which lies beyond.[358] As such, they command knowledge not possessed by "any scholars other than them, neither the jurists nor the partisans of *ḥadīth*."[359]

Finally, the very personal stakes for many defenders of *wilāyah* must be kept in full view when these positions are considered. Ṣūfī authorities were not simply defending their masters in their discipline; instead, they often envisioned themselves as from the most exclusive circles within the *Awliyā'*. We have already seen that many Ṣūfī writers included themselves among the *Awliyā'* in discussing their spiritual experiences (e.g., al-Kharrāz and al-Junayd speak of their *own* experiences with ecstatic union with God). In other words, they weren't simply writing as disciples defending their quest for *wilāyah,* but rather, as those who had already arrived thereto. Some are more blatant in acknowledging their superiority over others. While specifically addressing the noblest ranks among the Friends (e.g., the Substitutes and the Mainstays), al-Tustarī confidently explains, "their method and their way is [precisely] what I [also] follow."[360] In so doing, al-Tustarī, declares his position among the saintly elite, or at least, as representative of their way. As aforementioned, he declares himself as the greatest of this group, saying of himself, "I am the proof of God (*hujjat Allāh*)" against humanity.[361] Similarly, al-Tirmidhī presented

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[358] Al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 5-6.
[359] Al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-*Lumaʿ, 10-11.
[360] Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr*, 77.
[361] It is no coincidence that this comes directly after his discussion on the Stakes and Substitutes, suggesting that al-Tustarī saw himself as one among their number. According to the scribe, al-Tustarī had the habit of saying to his students, "I am the proof of God to you all *especially* (*khāṣṣa*), and [also] more generally, to all humankind." It seems that such a bold claim was not meant for a public audience; Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr*, 77. The *awliyā'* as the proofs of God is echoed by al-Tirmidhī. See O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 102, 109.

himself as one of the Substitutes, and even as the Seal of the Saints which oversees them all. In his autobiography, he reports a visionary dream experienced by his wife (whom he regards as a high achieving *walī* in her own right) wherein "the Commander" (a reference to God) collects forty men from all of the people of the world (a clear reference to already well-known traditions on the Forty *Abdāl*); in the dream, al-Tirmidhī is presented as the last of the Forty to complete their number, without which, destruction would have ensued.[362] These comments remind us that Ṣūfī apologies for the *Awliyā'* are not dispassionate disquisitions on the merits of the distant *Awliyā'*; in defending the *Awliyā'*, many of the authors are defending their own merits and staking a claim for standing in their society as well.

While Ṣūfīs were occasionally taken to task for their claims of direct communion with God, in most cases, they would justify themselves by references to scripture and respected traditions, as discussed above, so that no attempts at silencing them through judicial means could eventually succeed. On the rarest occasion, opposition rose to the state level. In one exemplary case, in the year 264/877-8, a popular preacher of Basra, Ghulām Khalīl (d. 275/888), preyed upon the caliph in Baghdad to round up some seventy-odd Ṣūfīs on the accusation that they inappropriately spoke of mutual passionate love (*ʿishq*) between themselves and God, and stated that they no longer feared God, but rather, only claimed to love him. The important Ṣūfī who lead the defense on behalf of his party,

[362] For al-Tirmidhī's telling of the dream, see Radtke's translation, alongside his reflections in Radtke and O'Kane, *Concept of Sainthood,* 31-34. Here, Radtke speaks only of al-Tirmidhī as being the highest of the forty men in the dream; elsewhere, Radtke states explicitly that the mystic saw himself as the Seal. Other indications of this appear elsewhere in al-Tirmidhī's *Sīrah* where he speaks of the Seal's ability to recognize his rank (like all the Friends); see Radtke and O'kane, *Concept of Sainthood*, 206-207. Sviri also observes that al-Tirmidhī saw himself as among the *abdāl*; Sviri, *Perspectives on Early Islamic Mysticism*, 3. It has also been argued that al-Junayd considered himself among the elite of the *Awliyā'*. See Ahmet Karamustafa, "walaya according to al-Junayd," 65-66.

Aḥmad Ibn Abī al-Ḥawarī al-Nūrī (d. 295/907-8), eventually fled Baghdad after the incident, demonstrating that the threat Ghulām Khalīl, and those whom he represented, was not insignificant. At the same time, upon conclusion of the trials, no one was judged guilty of blasphemy, for the Ṣūfīs managed to defend themselves and their claims by way of scripture and received knowledge. Spectacularly, the acclaimed Ṣūfī, al-Junayd escaped arrest altogether by claiming that he was not a Ṣūfī but rather a student of jurisprudence.[363] Eventually, al-Nūrī also returned to Baghdad after the death of the caliph who presided over the inquisition, al-Muʿtamid (d. 279/892). The incident demonstrates the occasionally precarious position of the Ṣūfīs, and the remarkable ability of Ṣūfī discourse to adopt circulating processes of knowledge formation in the broader Sunnī movement (especially in the form of received knowledge) towards apologizing for their claims. Like al-Junayd, they succeeded in presenting themselves as masters of spirituality who nonetheless, by mastering the disciplines of others as well, bested their counterparts. With the success of the Ṣūfīs in the trial, and with the return of al-Nūrī to Baghdād, the incident also represents their relative stability, and that the Ṣūfīs were here to stay.

[363] My account of this incident follows that in Karamustafa, *Formative Period of Sufism*, 11-12, 23; Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 60-63; and Gerhard Böwering, "Early Sufism Between Persecution and Heresy," in *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, eds. Frederick de Jong & Bernd Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 55-56.

CHAPTER 5: DELIMITNG THE PARAMETERS OF MIRACLES

5.0 Introduction

This chapter picks up on the themes discussed in the preceding chapter, while focusing on key issues of debate between Sunnīs and Muʿtazilites with respect to the miracles of the saints, *karāmāt al-awliyā'*. As I will show, this debate turned on conflicting views regarding the epistemic value of miracle reports, conceptions about what can be accepted of God, and anxieties concerning the encroachment of saintly miracles on the apologetic miracles of prophets. Alongside revisiting the Sunnī-Ṣūfī writers we engaged in the preceding chapter, this chapter will also highlight the integration of *wilāya* vis-à-vis *karāmāt* into broader Sunnī thought by looking at how Sunnī theologians up to the fifth/eleventh century, particular those belonging to the Sunnī Ashʿarī school of theology, contributed to the adoption of *karāmāt al-awliyā'* as a fact of doctrine. Among those scholars which I engage are Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013),[364] ʿAbd al-Mālik Al-Kharkūshī (d. 407/1016),[365] Hibat Allāh Ibn al-Ḥasan

[364] Al-Bāqillānī's *Kitab al-Bayān* aims at explicating the distinctions in various categories of supernatural events, among them, saintly miracles, which he affirms; Muḥammad Ibn al-Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī, *Miracle and Magic Kitāb al-Bayān: A Treatise on the Nature of the Apologetic Miracle and its Differentiation from Charisms, Trickery, Divination, Magic and Spells*, ed. Richard J Mccarthy (Beirut: Librairie Orientale, 1958). McCarthy presents an edited version of the Arabic, with an English introduction. Unfortunately, the section which deals with saintly miracles is missing from the extant manuscript. Nonetheless, the author clearly mentions affirmation of saintly miracles and his intention to explain how they differ from prophetic miracles in his introduction to the contents of his work (al-Bāqillānī, 23). Al-Bāqillānī's views on *karāmah* are also corroborated in an extant letter wherein he responds to a question on *karāmāt*. The letter appears in al-Wansharīsī's (d. 914/1508) compilation of *fatwas* (juridical rulings) of scholars and jurists from North Africa and al-Andalus; for the letter, see Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad Ibn Yaḥyā al-Wanshīrīsī, *al-Miʿyār al-Muʿrib wa al-Jāmiʿ al-Maghrib ʿan Fatāwā Ahl Ifrīqīya wa al-Andalus wa al-Maghrib*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥajjī (Morocco: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1981), 11:248-252.

[365] ʿAl-Kharkushī's *Tahdhīb al-Asrār* is a collection of the sayings of Sufī forebearers; ʿAbd al-Malik Ibn Muḥammad Al-Kharkushī, *Tahdhīb al-Asrār*, ed. Bassām Muḥammad Bārūd (Abu Dhabi: al-Mujtamiʿ al-Thaqafī, 1999). On this work and its author, see Christopher Melchert, "Khargūshī, *Tahdhīb al-Asrār*," *Bulletin of the SOAS* 73, no. 1 (2010): 29-44.

al-Lālakā'ī (d. 418/1027),[366] Abu Manṣūr ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037),[367] Abu al-Maʿālī ʿAbd al-Mālik al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085),[368] and Abu Bakr Aḥmad al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066).[369] It must be said that a number of our writers on Sufism, particularly al-Qushayrī and al-Kalābādhī,[370] were themselves affiliated with the Ashʿarī theological school, reflecting the syncretic and cosmopolitan nature of a high Sunnism that was in development by the fourth/tenth century; this high Sunnism saw a normative Islam that included a set of acceptable schools in law, theology, and Sufism,[371] and as this chapter will demonstrate, the adoption of *karamāt* into Sunnī creedal works was a product of this process.

After presenting the Sunnī perspective on *kaāmāt*, I then turn to the Muʿtazilite critique. While the rejection of the Muʿtazilites is well-recorded, unfortunately, only a

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[366] Originally part of the author's voluminous work on creed, *Sharḥ Uṣūl iʿtiqād Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿah*, the section on *karāmāt* has been published as a single monograph: Hibat Allāh Ibn al-Ḥasan al-Lālakā'ī, *Karāmāt al-Awliyā' li'l-Lālakā'ī*, ed. Nash'at Ibn Kamāl al-Miṣrī (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Islāmiyyah, 2010). Throughout, I rely on the latter.

[367] ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*.

[368] A al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Irshād*.

[369] Abū Bakr Aḥmad al-Bayhaqī, *al-Iʿtiqād wa al-Hidāyah ilā Sabīl al-Rashād ʿalā Madhhab al-Salaf wa Aṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth*, ed. Aḥmad ʿIṣām al-Kātib (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīda, 1980). On the scholar's life and thought, see J. Robson, "Al-Bayhaḳī," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 1:1130.

[370] Al-Kalābādādhī's Ashʿarism is evident in his discussion on the tenets of Islam which clearly intend to prove that Ṣūfī creed lies well within the bounds of Ashʿarī orthodoxy. See Arberry's introduction to his translation of al-Kalābādhis *Taʿrruf,* xvi; P. Nwyia, "al-Kalābādhī," *Encyclopaedia of Islām*, 2nd ed (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 4:467. For al-Qushayrī's affiliation with, and importance for the Ashʿarī faction in Nishāpūr, see Martin Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur'ān Scholar*, 220-236. Below, I also include Abū Nāṣr al-Sarrāj in discussing those Ṣūfīs who cohere with Ashaʿrī thought. Unfortunately, little is known about al-Sarrāj's life so that we cannot definitively speak of his theological affiliations. However, we do know that he is held as a representative of Ṣūfī orthodoxy. He traveled widely and like other Ṣūfī writers, endeavored to demonstrate that Ṣūfī thought aligned with Islamic orthodoxy, which at his time, would have been Ashʿarī creed; see Nicholson's introduction in al-Sarrāj's *al-Lumaʿ*, pp. I-XII. As we will see, his ideas on *karāmah* vis-à-vis *muʿjiza* correspond to those of his Ṣūfī-Ashʿarī colleagues.

[371] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazāli (450/1058-505/1111) is often seen as the most influential figure in accelerating this process, but the development of a syncretic Sunnī Islam of Law, Spirituality, and Theology as normative began long before. For surveys of this process, see Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam Volume Two: The Expansion of Islam in the Middle Periods* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), especially, "Maturity and Dialogue among the Intellectual Traditions, c. 945-1111" (152-200), and "The Victory of the New Sunnī Internationalism, 1118-1258" (155-191); see also, Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 156-182.

few Muʿtazilite works from this period which expressly discuss *karāmāt* are extant. In particular, the primary source for the Muʿtazilite position has been the work of al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025), [372] which I discuss below. I will supplement my analysis of ʿAbd al-Jabbār's work by studying the *Nishwār al-Muḥāḍarah* of the Muʿtazilite chronicler, al-Muḥassin al-Tanūkhī (329/941-384/994).[373] The *Nishwār* itself is not a theological work, and instead, intends at documenting reported news on current events; it is in short, a digest of current topics of conversation among people in the know. However, the subtext is rich with reflections of the author's Muʿtazilite biases. As I demonstrate below, the text is both a source for the success of wonder-working saints, and for Muʿtazilite negative appraisal of this phenomenon via the author's anxieties about purported *karāmāt*.

5.1 The Argument for *Karāmāt al-Awliyā'* in Sunnī Thought

5.1.1 Received Knowledge: The Argument from History

By the fifth/eleventh century, Sunnī texts are unanimous on the presence of an elite class of individuals whom God has drawn close to Himself and who as a result, are

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[372] Al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār Aḥmad al-Ḥamadānī, *al-Mughnī fī Abwāb al-Tawḥid wa al-ʿAdl*. Vol. XV *al-Tanabbu'āt wa al-Muʿjizāt*. eds. Maḥmūd al-Khuḍayrī and Maḥmūd Muḥammad Qāsim (Cairo: al-Dār al-Miṣriyyah li't-Ta'līf wa al-Nashr, 1965). Important studies on ʿAbd al-Jabbār include Gabriel Said Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian in the Sectarian Milieu: Abd al-Jabbār and the Critique of Christian Origins* (Leiden: Brill, 2004). As the title suggests, this study brilliantly historicizes the *tathbīt* debates and then carefully and systematically elucidates Abd al-Jabbar's argument against Christianity on the issue of Muhammad's prophethood. Also useful is Maha Elkaiy-Friemuth's *God and Humans in Islamic Thought: ʿAbd al-Jabbār, Ibn Ṣīnā and al-Ghazālī*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 41-73. In this work, El-Kaiy-Freimuth presents ʿAbd al-Jabbar's doctrine on the various means to knowledge

[373] Al-Qāḍī Abū ʿAlī al-Muḥassin al-Tanūkhī, *Kitāb Nishwār al-Muḥāḍara wa Akhbār al-Mudhākāra bi-Alfāẓ al-Mukhālafa*, ed. ʿAbbūd al-Shāljī. 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣadir, 1995). Much of this work, including sections relevant to our study, was translated by Margoliouth (d. 1940). Throughout, I rely on his translations, except where stated otherwise; David Samuel Margoliouth, *The Table-Talk of a Mesopotamian Judge* (London: The Royal Asiatic Society, 1922). On the importance of this work in Arabic literary history, see Muhsin al-Musawi, "Abbasid Popular Narrative: The Formation of Readership and Cultural Production," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 38, no. 3 (2007), 281-286 *passim*. I became aware of al-Tanūkhī as a source for Muʿtazilite thought on *karāmāt* through Sobieroj's analysis of al-Tanūkhī's disdain for Ṣūfī conduct and teachings. See Florian Sobieroj, "The Muʿtazila and Sufism," 81-90.

the choicest sources for true knowledge and the most exemplary models for humankind; their conduct is by definition, the standard of rectitude, save the occasional, insignificant lapse (on which, see the previous chapter). There is also a close consensus that God sets them apart from other human beings through extraordinary feats. Reportedly, Sahl al-Tustarī claimed, "Miracles will appear for whoever has renounced this world for forty days truthfully and with a sincere heart;" such will have the ability to take "what he wants, how he wants, from wherever he wants." [374] Similarly, as al-Tirmidhī explains, besides the moral qualities of the Friends,[375] there are also external markers of their sainthood, the most visible of which are their supernatural feats (*ayāt*). In this period, the prooftexts for *karāmāt* become stable. First, the Qur'an is presented as a primary source. For our writers, the strongest Qur'anic example of saintly miracles are the wonders that manifested for Mary, Mother of Christ. Besides the gift of a virginal birth (Q 19:21), the Qur'an also presents incidents during her pregnancy where she is provided with sustenance out of thin air (Q 3:37). When the pangs of labor (combined with the challenges of a suspicious pregnancy) drive her to exclaim, "would that I had died before this, and that I were a thing forgotten," Maryam hears from below, "do not grief," and she is told to shake the palm tree, at which point, fresh fruits fall at her feet (Q 19:22-25). As all admit, the force of this argument relies on granting that Maryam was not a prophet

[374] This report on Sahl al-Tustarī appears in al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Luma*, 315; and Al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah al-Qushayrīyyah*, 2:529. Al-Qushayrī's version adds, "if they [i.e., miracles] fail to appear, it is because he is not sincere in her renunciation."

[375] These include, "resolute purpose, right guidance, a sense of shame, acting according to that which is due in matters large and small, generosity of soul, bearing up under grievance, compassion, giving sincere advice (*naṣīḥa*), soundness of disposition, and being good-natured towards God's disposal of the world and towards mankind's moral traits;" Radtke and O'Kane (trans. and eds.), *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islam*, 126.

(since the fact of prophetic miracles was by this point, a settled matter).[376] Also common is reference to the Young Men of the cave: the Qur'an mentions an unspecified number of faithful youth in a pre-Islamic, Godless society who, after retreating to a cave upon God's instruction, God sustains them in their sleep and protects them from detection, till they emerge from the cave years later, fully preserved (Q 18:19-26).[377] Here again, these individuals are not specified as prophets in the Qur'an, thus providing justification for the assumption that they must have been *awliyā'* instead, whom God graced with a miracle. A third proof cited for non-prophetic, and thus, saintly miracles in the Qur'an is the case of an individual in Solomon's court simply identified in the Qur'an as "he who had knowledge of Revelation," and who upon Solomon's request for the Throne of the Queen of Sheba, exclaimed, "I will bring it to you before your glance returns (i.e., in the blink of an eye) (Q 27:41)"[378] So, despite his non-prophetic status, this figure is miraculously able to traverse a distance between Solomon's realm and that of Sheba in an instant.

For other proofs of such gifts, our defenders of *karāmāt*, being themselves disciples of *ḥadīth*, also turn to the authority of traditions. It must be reiterated that the notion of divine selection had so widely penetrated Sunnī thought by the third/ninth century that it was reflected in prophetic reports collected by Sunnī traditionists of that period onward, including those not particularly associated with the discipline which

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[376] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 161-162. This is mentioned in nearly all the treatises discussed in this chapter, especially given that it provides qur'anic justification for *karāmāt*, on the assumption that Mary was not a prophet. See al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 320; al-Kalābādhī, *al-Taʿarruf*, 156; al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, 254; al-Kharkūshī, *Tahdhīb al-Asrār*, 375, al-Lālakā'ī, *Karāmāt al-Awliyā'*, 21, 27-30. It is commonly explained that Maryam would be presented with fruits out of their season, fruits of the winter in the summer and vice versa.

[377] al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, 254; al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*, 2:526.

[378] al-Kalābādhī, *al-Taʿrruf*, 156; Al-Kharkūshī, *Tahdhīb al-Asrār*, 375; al-Lālakā'ī, *Karāmāt al-Awliyā'*, 23-26; al-Qushayrī, *al-Riālah al-Qushayriyyah*, 2:522.

cultivated *wilāyah*, namely Sufism.[379] Importantly, while the notion that miracles manifest for other than prophets is assumed in their works as will become clear, many traditionists in the third/ninth century do not show any recognition of a miracle category called *karāmāh*, which are particular to the *awliyā'* qua their position as *awliyā'*. Instead, it is in the hands of those involved in Sufism and Sunnī theology (and intersections of the two) that *karāmāt* as a category becomes crystallized. Those traditionists who report on extra-prophetic miracles without speaking to *karāmāt* as a concept include: Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 240/855),[380] the two authors of the so-called *Ṣaḥīḥayn* (the "Two [Compilations of] Authentic *ḥadīth*]")—Muḥammad Ibn Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) and Muslim Ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Naysābūrī (d. 261/875)[381]—and lastly, Ibn Abī al-Dunyā (d. 281/894). This last scholar especially exemplifies the porous boundaries between the discipline of *ḥadīth* and other sciences; in Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, we have a bona fide traditionist active in the epicenter of formal Sufism, Baghdad, and who is not associated with the Ṣūfī circles of his day; yet, he penned a work solely dedicated to preserving *ḥadīth* on the *awliyā'*, in which he includes miracles for a selection of these figures (from the era of the Companions to just before his own time). However, as with the remaining aforementioned traditionists, the term "*karāmah*" does not appear in his work. For these

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[379] As observed by Karamustafa, *The Formative Period*, 128.

[380] On the scholar's life and teachings, see Christopher Melchert, *Ahmad Ibn Hanbal* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006). For a discussion on the legacy of Ibn Ḥanbal throughout the centuries, see Jon Hoover, "Hanbalī Theology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 625-646

[381] The *Ṣaḥiḥ* of al-Bukhārī and the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim, both collections of "authentic" (*ṣaḥīḥ*) reports, went on to achieve canonical status in Sunnī Islam, and together comprise the most authoritative sources for Sunnī thought after the Qur'ān (they play a greater role than the Qur'ān in defining jurisprudence, since the Qur'ān is comparatively light on jurisprudential matters, and so, the Qur'ān is interpreted *in light of* accepted traditions). The seminal work on this remains that of Jonathan Brown who has demonstrated that the canonization of the so-called *ṣaḥīḥayn* ("The Two *Ṣaḥīḥs*") began approximately between 390/1000 and 460/1070 with the approving assessments and advocacy of traditionists like al-Dāraquṭnī and al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071); see Jonathan Brown *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunnī Ḥadīth Canon* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

authors, that God manifested miracles for non-prophets was known, but they were as of yet unaware of "*karāmah*" as a category onto itself to be examined.[382] Unbeknownst to them, the traditionists would aid the cause of Ṣūfī masters, as Ṣūfī authors, well aware and convinced of the authority imbued in the *ḥadīth*, readily availed themselves of available traditions toward legitimizing their claims.[383]

Corresponding to the unparalleled knowledge of the *awliyā'*, many of our works present them as commanding "*firāsah*," a supernatural ability to accurately intuit that which is normally inaccessible to the senses,[384] and adduce transmitted reports on the phenomenon as evidence. For one, there is a widely reported tradition in which the Prophet states, "beware of the *firāsah* of the [true] believer, for s/he sees with the light of God." In the report, the Prophet associates this phenomenon with a Qur'anic verse which refers to those who reflect and gain wisdom from stories of the ancients as "those who are discerning (*mutawassimūn*)" (Q 15:75).[385] The tradition cited is frequently accompanied by another wherein the Prophet states that God has certain servants who have the gift to "know people through insight (*al-tawassum*)."[386] Here, *al-tawassum* can be read as an ability to perceive signs imperceptible to commonfolk, thus, enabling one to know of

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[382] For a similar observation, see Karamustafa, *The Formative Period*, 127-128.
[383] Karamustafa, *The Formative Period*, 128; Brown, "Faithful Dissenters: Sunnī Skepticism about the Miracles of Saints," 135.
[384] This supernatural perspicacity is often recognized as among the gifts of the *awliyā'*; e.g., in his list of pioneering saints, al-Qushayrī speaks of Abū al-Khayr al-Aqtaʿ as one who "had [many] miracles and piercing clairvoyance," al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*, 1:522; see also al-Tirmidhī in O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 155; al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 123.
[385] Abū ʿĪsā al-Tirmidhī (d. 270/884), *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, ed. Bashshār ʿAwād Maʿrūf (Beirūt: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1996), no. 3127, 5:200; Abū al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī, *Musnad al-Shāmiyyīn*, ed. Ḥamdī Ibn ʿAbd al-Majīd al-Salafī (Beirut: Mu'assassat al-Risālah, 1984), no. 2046, 3:183 (without mention of the Qur'anic verse); Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 17:121-122. Another version presented by al-Ṭabarī (17:122) adds that the true believer "…speaks with facilitation (*tawfīq*) from God." Note that the traditionist, Abu ʿIsā al-Tirmidhī differs from the mystic, al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī.
[386] Abū Bakr al-Bazzār (d. 292/905), *Musnad al-Bazzār*, no. 6935, 13:326; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, 17:121; al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-Awsaṭ*, no. 2935, 3:207.

others what lies deep in their consciousness.[387] As al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī explains, *firāsah* is etymologically related to the word for horsemanship, *furūsiyyah*; whereas the limbs of the body rides by horse, the heart of the *walī* rides by the light of God, allowing the rider's insight to traverse, peer through the entire expanse of creation and down to the subtle spheres of reality.[388] Similarly, al-Kalābādhī reports al-Junayd's explanation of *firāsah* as "the alighting of accuracy" (*muṣādafat al-iṣāba*)—that is, accuracy in perception—which remains with the one who possesses this gift *at all times*.[389] An oft-mentioned display of *firāsah* in these works is a case involving Abū Bakr (d. 13/634), the first Caliph after the Prophet. As he neared his death, Abū Bakr revealed to his daughter, ʿĀ'ishah, his prescience regarding the sex of his in-utero offspring, ʿĀ'ishāh's sister-to-be, in order to enjoin ʿĀ'ishah to ensure all his children receive their fair share of inheritance after he passes. In so doing, Abū Bakr displays his clairvoyance.[390] Then there is the case of ʿUmar (d. 23/644), the second Caliph, who during his reign, foretells that destruction will be wrought at the hands of his contemporary, Mālik al-Ashtar (d.

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[387] See for example al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir al-Uṣul,* 3: 87, where he explains, it is "to know the signs of God."
[388] Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir al-Uṣūl*, 3:86-87.
[389] Al-Kalābādhī, *al-Taʿarruf*, 287. al-Kalābādhī extrapolates from al-Junayd's statement that divine gifts remain perpetually for the Friends of God; al-Kalābādhī discusses *firāsah* further in al *al-Taʿarruf*, 66-69.
[390] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 159; al-Kalabadhi, *al-Taʿrruf*, 157. This report appears quite early, transmitted already in the *Muwaṭṭa* of Imam Mālik (d. 179/795). See Mālik b. Anas, *al-Muwaṭṭa: Recension of Yaḥyā b. Yaḥya al-Laythī (d. 234/848)*, ed. and trans. Fadel and Monnette, 626. This incident is also mentioned by al-Sarrāj, alongside two other occasions in which Abu Bakr is shown to possess clairvoyance: 1.) when he decided in opposition to the thinking of the remaining Companions (according to al-Sarrāj) to launch the so-called "Apostasy Wars," and 2.) his decision after the Prophet's death to follow through with the Prophet's plans to dispatch an army under leadership of a particularly young leader (Usāmah Ibn Zayd), despite the reservations of a sizeable group among the Companions. From the perspective of Sunnī historiography, both decisions proved wise in hindsight, and the point in both cases is to demonstrate Abū Bakr's foresight as of divine provenance, thus allowing him to be in the right, even when opposed by well-respected Companions; see al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Luma*, 123.

37/657).[391] Most famously, there is the alleged incident wherein the same ʿUmar provides his general with emergency assistance by directly calling out to, and advising him from afar. As the tradition goes, ʿUmar's commander Sāriyah Ibn Zunaym was engaged in battle in Iraq, when at a pivotal moment, ʿUmar suddenly cried out while delivering the Friday sermon far off in Medina, "O Sāriyah, the Mountain! O Sāriyāh, the Mountain!" When Sāriyah later returned from the campaign, he informed the caliph that after his forces were close to defeat, they suddenly heard ʿUmar's disembodied voice (not knowing of its source), and then proceeded to the mountains. This proved to be a strategically advantageous position which allowed them to defeat the enemy.[392]

Beyond these epistemological miracles, there are other traditions attesting to credulity-stretching incidents for non-Prophets. The texts frequently mention a Prophetic report on one Jurayj, a pre-Islamic monk who had secluded himself in a hermitage; as the report goes, Jurayj had the habit of isolating himself in devotion, even when his mother sought his company or required his service. At one point, she called for him from outside

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[391] This appears in the following works: O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 10; al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir al-Uṣūl*, 3:87; Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-ʿIlal wa Maʿrifat al-Rijāl*, ed. Waṣī Allāh Ibn Muḥammad ʿAbbās (Riyadh: Dār al-Khānī, 2001); Abu Bakr al-Khallāl (d.311/923), *al-Sunnah,* ed. ʿAṭiyah al-Zahrānī (Riyad: Dār al-Rāya, 1989), no. 836, 3:516. Mālik al-Ashtar would come to play a decisive role in the uprising against the third Caliph, Uthmān (r. 23-35/644-656), and in the interrelated campaign for the counter caliph, Alī (r. 45-40/656-661); on this, see Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, 60-70.

[392] This widely reported tradition is cited in al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 321, al-Kharkūshi, *Tahdhīb al-Asrār*, 362; al-Kalābādhi, *al-Taʿrruf,* 157, who mentions that Sāriyah was a month's journey away from Medina. For other variants see: Abu Nuʿaym al-Iṣbahānī, *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah*, ed. Muḥammad Rawwās Qalʿajī and ʿAbd al-Barr ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār al-Nafā'is, 1986), nos. 525-528, 579-580; Aḥmad Ibn Hanbal *Faḍā'il al-Ṣāḥābah*, no. 355, 1:269; Abu Bakr al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah*, ed. ʿAbd al-Muʿṭī Qalʿajī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1988), 6:370. The tradition also appears in al-Sulamī's (d. 412/1021) topical collection of forty *ḥadiths* on Sufism, adduced for affirming *karāmāt*; Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad al-Sulamī, *al-Arbaʿūn fī al-Taṣawwuf* (Hayderabad: Maṭbaʿat Majlis Dā'irat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyyah, 1981), no. 5, p. 3. Interestingly, in his magnum opus on the lives and teachings of Ṣūfīs, the *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣufiyya*, al-Sulamī provides no reports of actual miracles performed by the Friends and instead, only indicates the possibility of their occurrence. See Thibon's introduction in Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, Les générations des Soufis: *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya* de Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn al-Sulamī (325/837-412/2021), trans. Jean-Jacques Thibon (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 9-12.

as he worshipped in his hermitage, prompting an internal conflict: should he dutifully answer to his mother, or should he remain as is, with God? After consideration, he chose the latter. After three such occurrences, his mother cursed him with the fate of meeting humiliation in the face of evil, unvirtuous women. The curse finally materializes when a woman of disrepute falsely accuses Jurayj of having illegitimately fathered her son, for which the king orders his hermitage destroyed. Jurayj, upon recognizing that this is his mother's curse come to fruition, smiles, and takes the humiliation in stride. However, Jurayj is soon vindicated when the boy, in his infanthood, miraculously speaks to his true paternity at the royal court.[393] On the surface, the original *ḥadīth* aims at warning of one's duty to one's parents, which takes pride of place in Qur'anic ethics.[394] However, it also may be read as showing God to redirect His friends when they lapse, even if through trial and humiliation, and also, eventually protecting their honor, even through supernatural means. It is thus included among prooftexts for saintly miracles by some authors.[395] Nature-defying miracles are also reported for the Companions of the Prophet as well. In one oft-cited case, the Prophet notices the sun and its rays brilliantly shining as never before; as he marvels at this, the angel Gabriel comes to explain that this was on behalf of

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[393] This tradition, appears in many collections of the 3rd/9th century, often as part of a longer *ḥadīth* on the Three who spoke as infants: Jesus, Jurayj, and an unnamed infant with his own edifying story; Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 8071, 31:434-436; Muḥammad Ibn Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī, *al-adab al-mufrad*, ed. Samīr Ibn Amīn al-Zuhayrī (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, 1998), no. 33, p. 20-21; Muslim Ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Naysābūrī, *Ṣaḥiḥ Muslim*, ed. Muḥammad Fu'ād ʿAbd al-Bāqī (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat ʿĪsā al-Bābī, 1955), no. 2550, 4:1976. For a summary of the tradition in English, see also John Renard, *Friends of God: Islamic Images of Piety, Commitment, and Servanthood* (Los Angeles: UCLA Press, 2008), 25-26.

[394] It is clear that many traditionists took this report as serving this edifying function. For example, in his collection of *ḥadīth* on ethics, al-Bukhārī, places this tradition in a section dealing with the rights of parents over their children. Here, it appears alongside other traditions to caution against disobeying parents and warn of the grave sin in causing one's parents to cry, and traditions which explain that the supplication of (wronged) parents against their child is always answered: al-Bukhārī, *al-Adab al-Mufrad*, 18-20. This function is recognized in Ṣūfī works as well, e.g., al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī who reports that the Prophet commented, "had Jurayj true understanding of religion, he would have known that answering to his mother is itself a part of worshipping his Lord", al-Tirmidhī, *Nawadir al-Uṣūl*, 2:224, 4:6-7.

[395] E.g., al-Sarrāj*, Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 321; so too, al-Qusharyī, *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*, 2:526.

the Companion Muʿāwiyah al-Laythī, who had passed away in Medina on that very day, for upon his death, God sent seventy thousand angels to pray over him—hence the radiance in the horizons.[396] Then, there is the tradition of the two Companions Usaid Ibn Ḥuḍair and ʿAbbād Ibn Bishr, for whom, after they visited with the Prophet on a particularly dark night, God made a light shine from their staff as bright as a lamp, which allowed them to return home safely.[397]

Additionally, there is a prophetic tradition of the three pre-Islamic young men who resorted to a cave for safety in torrential rain; eventually, a rock rolled over the entrance, enclosing them in the cave. They then decided that they would each invoke God by virtue of the best deed each had ever performed, and as each individual took his turn, the rock rolled open ever so slightly, till it finally opened all the way after the third.[398] In another tradition cited by al-Sarrāj to prove *karāmāt*, the Prophet reports of two pre-

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[396] The companion is identified as Muʿāwiyah Ibn Muʿāwiyah al-Laythī [al-Muzanī]. When the Prophet asks how it is that Muʿāwiyāh came to attain to this rank, the angel explains that he had a habit of constantly reciting the 113th chapter of the Qur'ān, *al-Ikhlās* ("sincerity"), which has long been favored for its pithy, aphoristic declaration of God's oneness. The *ḥadīth* appears in the following texts: Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-Awliyā'*, no. 21, p. 16; Abū Yaʿlā Aḥmad al-Mawṣilī (d. 307), *Musnad Abī Yaʿlā*, ed. Saʿīd Ibn Muḥammad Sannārī (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2013), no. 4267, 6:198-199; Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/845), *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, 5:130-131; al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah*, no. 790, 5:245-246; Abū Ḥātim Muḥammad Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/965), *Kitāb al-Majrūḥīyīn*, ed. Ḥamdī ʿAbd al-Majīd al-Salafī (Riyadh: Dār al-Ṣumayʿī), no. 811, 2:172-1). The report was highly problematized in Sunnī *ḥadīth* criticism and rejected as unreliable by many on the grounds of a severely defective chain. Thus, Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr (328/978-463/1071), after analyzing the various chains for this *ḥadīth*, concludes that they are weak. Abū ʿUmar Yūsuf Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istīʿāb fī Maʿrifat al-Aṣḥāb*, ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Bajāwī (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1992), 3:1424-1425. For more on the reception of this tradition in Sunnī *ḥadīth* criticism, see the editor's comments in Abū Yāʿlā al-Mawṣilī, *Musnad Abī Yaʿlā*, 6:198-201.

[397] Al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 321; al-Kalābādhī, *al-Taʿarruf*, 156. The men are unnamed in al-Kalābādhī—they are simply the two men, suggesting the author assumes his audience is familiar with the tradition. The tradition appears in the following compilations: Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 12980, 20:295; Ibn Saʿd, *al-Tabaqāt al-Kubrā*, 3:560; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān*, no. 2243 & 2244, 3:191-192; Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Aḥmad al-Nasā'ī, *al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, ed. Ḥasan ʿAbd al-Munʿim Shalabī (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 2001), no. 8188, 7:347.

[398] Al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 321. We will forego mentioning the actions for the sake of brevity and opt instead for the virtues they reflect. The *ḥadith* preaches via each deed respectively, precedence of one's parents to one's own (wife and children), the possibility of being moved by a call to conscience even when on the verge of sin, and lastly, being generously scrupulous in economic dealings with others, even when this entails loss for oneself and gain for the other. This appears in 3rd/9th century collections, among them al-Bukharī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 3465, 4:172; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim,* no 2743, 4:2099-2100.

Islamic instances in which animals spoke in human tongue; in one, a man rides a cow and beats it mercilessly, whereafter the oppressed cow declares, "I was not created for this; I was only created for sloughing;" in the second, a wolf runs a way with a sheep in the presence of its shepherd, and when the shepherd finally manages to rescue the sheep after much struggle, the wolf reminds him that there will be a time when "the Beast" (an apocalyptic figure) will come, and there will be no one to guard the sheep from it.[399] It is odd that al-Sarrāj would include this report, as the personalities highlighted in them do not present any qualities that suggest them to be *awliyā'*; in fact, we might say the first personality, shown to abuse his cow, is the very opposite of a *walī*. It appears al-Sarrāj intends to deploy all reported evidence of non-prophetic marvels at his disposal with the aim of making his reader more accepting of *karāmāt* specifically.

That the miracles become an important aspect of the myth surrounding the *awliyā'* is evident in the continuous chronicling of miracles as they manifest over time, with many of the miracles for later generations being more fantastical than those reported for earlier generations, including the Companions.[400] In one case, it is said that the second/eighth century ascetic, ʿAbd al-Wāḥid Ibn Zayd (d. ca. 133/750) reports of his good, young servant who had passed away in his company while they were at sea on a war campaign. Every attempt to bury the young man failed, for the earth rejected his

[399] After telling each story, the congregants express disbelief that an animal would talk, when the Prophet exclaims that he believes in the story, and so too, Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, though neither of them were witnesses to the incidents. Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, the first caliphs of Islam after the Prophet, and are regarded as illegitimate in the Shi'ī tradition. The *ḥadīth* serves the dual purpose of preaching unwavering conviction in whatever the Prophet reports (no matter how seemingly incredulous), and in bolstering Sunnī dogma for the precedence of these two among the companions. It appears in al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Lumāʿ*, 321; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 3471, 4:174; Ibn Hibban, *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān*, no. 3122, 4:102; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2388, 4:185.

[400] For a discussion on miracle stories in Muslim hagiography broadly, along with a typology of miracles, see John Renard, *Friends of God*, 91-118. See also the list of hagiographical works in the appendix to Brown, "Faithful Dissenters," 166-168.

body several times over, in three different locations. As ʿAbd al-Wāḥid stood and considered his next steps, eagles and vultures swooped down and tore his body to pieces as they fed on him. When ʿAbd al-Wāḥid reached Basra and sought out the boy's mother to inquire about his spiritual discipline, she explained that her son had the habit of asking God in prayer that he be raised on the Day of Judgment from the belly of birds, a reference to another cryptic prophetic tradition that speaks of the martyrs as alive in birds who have the throne of God as their residence.[401] In another case, an anonymous pious man prompted his disciple to reach into an empty purse and request an amount of money that he sought (thirty gold coins) while invoking the name of God, and upon doing so, the disciple drew out that specific amount that met his need, "no more, no less."[402]

Our sources also ensure to present miracles of near contemporaries, often relayed to our authors by direct witnesses, or with a few individuals removed from the incident by a short chain of transmission. In one case, a master reports having resorted to a miracle to satisfy a spectacularly mundane need: Al-Qushayrī reports that he once asked Aḥmad al-Ṭabrānī al-Sarkahsī outright if he had ever displayed miracles, to which the latter explained that during his early years on the path, whenever he was unable to find something to cleanse with after easing himself, he would draw something in thin air,

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[401] Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *al-Awliyā'*, no. 112, 46; ʿAbd al-Wāḥid Ibn Zayd (d. c. 133/750) was one of the prominent companions of the important mystic, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 109/728) and founded a settlement for ascetics at Abadan on the Persian Gulf. See Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 31. Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 16-18. We also find another proto-Ṣūfī, ʿUtbah al-Ghulām (fl. Early 2nd/8th century) recorded as making the same prayer in his supplications: Abu Nuʿaym al-Iṣbahānī, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'*, 6:226. The prayer itself is a reference to another *ḥadīth* wherein the Prophet explains that the souls of martyrs are alive in the bodies of green birds whose nests hang from the throne of the Almighty, and the martyrs eat the fruits of Paradise as they wish. The tradition appears in Abū ʿĪsā al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 1641, 3:278; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīh Muslim*, no. 1887, 3:150; Abū Dāwūd (d. 275/889), *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 2520, 4:174; ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī, *al-Muṣṣanaf*, no. 9554, 5:263. The traditions report this as part of the Prophet's explanation of the Qur'anic verse, "Never think of those martyred in the cause of God as dead. Rather, (they are) alive, with their Lord, provided for." (Q 3:169).

[402] Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-Awliyā',* no. 103, p. 42.

which would turn into a precious stone; after using it, he would simply discard it.[403] Of course, besides proving miracles for the saints, this report also has the benefit of showing al-Sarakhsī as impervious to worldly temptations, for he was happy to use precious stones for such a profane function, and happily discarded them at each turn. Like al-Qushayrī, al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988) includes accounts from contemporaries of the miraculous encounters they experienced themselves, which show that certain figures owed their fame, at least in part, to miracles associated with them. Among them is Jaʿfar al-Khuldī (d. 348/960) who is said to have once lost a gem to the Tigris River while on a journey, when he resorted to a prayer for lost property, which had proved effective for him in the past.[404] Lo and behold, he suddenly found his gem amidst the pages he had at hand. Remarkably, al-Sarrāj then claims that he was shown a volume of many pages in which was collected a sundry list of items which God had restored to those who made the same prayer. All figures mentioned in the volume, he confirms, were well-known for their piety, committed to the dictates of Islam, and true and reliable conveyors of traditions, as all of sound knowledge attest.[405] His point is that we have no reason to doubt this account.

There is also much talk of camaraderie with, and dominion over wild beasts for certain prominent *awliyā'* in generations preceding our sources. Reportedly, ʿAmr ibn ʿUtbah (d. 32/653) was so friendly with wild beasts that he would remain in prayer as lions wagged their tails around him.[406] Al-Qushayrī (376/987-465/1073) also reports that

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[403] Al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*, 2:531.
[404] The supplication reads, "Oh God, (Oh) He who will gather all humankind on the day regarding which there is no doubt, gather to me my lost property;" al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 317; also appears in al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*, 2:531.
[405] Al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 317.
[406] Al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*, 2:549; the report also states that a cloud would come over him whenever he prayed.

a certain Jābir al-Raḥbī declared: "Many of the people of al-Rahba often expressed to me their rejection of *karāmāt*, so one day I rode into Raḥba on a lion, and asked: 'Where are those who accuse the Friends of God of lying?' since then, they have left me alone.'"[407] In al-Sarrāj's *al-Lumaʿ*, Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) is said to have frequently received and hosted wild beasts in his specifically dedicated "Wild Beasts room."[408] What's more, al-Tustarī reportedly advised a desiring, yet anxious student, "do not consort with me any longer, if you are afraid of wild beasts."[409] Also, Abū al-Khayr al-Tinatī (d. 349/961), himself "famous for miracles," once went out to scold a lion for having scared a guest of his, and then gently admonished his guest for fearing the lion in the first place: "you were busy with putting [your] external [limbs] in order, thus you were afraid of the lion, whereas we were busy with putting [our] hearts in order, thus the lion was afraid of us."[410]

The importance of these reports in the eyes of Sunnī advocates for *karāmah* is apparent in their works. As al-Qushayrī (376/986-465/1072) understands, the widespread abundance (*tawātur*) of reports and stories surrounding all sorts of miracles make their existence irrefutable and makes assenting to the reality of *karāmāt* a creedal obligation

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[407] Al-Qusharyī, *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*, 2:530.

[408] Al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 317; interestingly, al-Sarrāj reveals here that he has received this story through less than exacting means and that this was a popular story regarding al-Tustarī which had been circulating in his hometown. Al-Sarrāj does not name a source for the story, though mentions that his source was "authentic." He informs us that he once visited al-Tustarī's lodges, where he entered a room "which the people would identify as 'the wild beast room.'" His group then asked the people about this odd name, at which point they shared the story. Al-Sarrāj then states that not a single person from the righteous persons of Tustar (al-Tustarī's hometown) rejected the story. This suggests the less demanding standards adopted in accepting and reporting accounts of miracles. Al-Qusharyī also records the tradition, adding that al-Tustarī would feed the lions meat, and then let them go; al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*, 2:530. For other legends surrounding al-Tustarī, see Bowering, *Mystical Vision*, 68-71.

[409] Al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 316; al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*, 2:530. Like al-Sarrāj, Al-Qushayrī adds that the entire population of Tustar was in agreement concerning this, despite their large numbers, and that no one denied it.

[410] Al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*, 2:530; his comments are also partly in response to the guest's having internally balked at the master having performed a technical error in his prayer.

(*wājib*). As he puts it, that they exist and that they manifest for the friends of God by His grace is a matter free from any doubt.[411] Indeed, "anyone who has kept the company of the Folk (i.e., the Ṣūfīs) and has received their reports and stories will have not even the slightest doubt" concerning the reality of *karāmāt*.[412] Likewise, Al-Kalābādhi (d. 380/990) writes that the Ṣūfīs are agreed in affirming miracles for the *awliyā'* ,"such as walking on water, talking with beasts, traveling from one place to another, or producing an object in another place or at another time;" and this is grounded first and foremost in the authentic traditions and verses of scripture that confirm the *karāmāt*.[413] For al-Tirmidhī, one has no choice but to accept the fact of saintly miracles, given the abundance of reports thereto; one who resists is simply "being very stubborn and acting audaciously towards God," and for this, "an evil calamity will befall him."[414] He inveighs against those "scholars of the outward" whose hearts are veiled by "an immense, evil blemish,"[415] Because they have not traversed the spiritual path, they do not taste the gifts enjoyed by the *awliyā'*, and so in their jealousy, they are compelled to read miracle

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[411] Al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah,* 2:522.
[412] Al-Qusharyī, 2:522.
[413] al-Kalābādhī, *al-Taʿrruf*, 156.
[414] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 163.
[415] O'Kane and Radtke, *Concept of Sainthood*, 155-156; cf. al-Sarrāj, who juxtaposes the science of the Ṣūfīs to that of the exoteric formalists, though he speaks in much less disparaging terms; interestingly however, he identifies those who reject the *karāmāt* with the blanket term of *ahl al-ẓāhir* ("Scholars of the Outward Sciences"), as though to say that those who remain at the shore of exoteric sciences without coupling this with spirituality are prone to ignorance of the *karāmāt* (al-Sarrāj, *al-Lumaʿ*, 318). See also al-Kalābādhī, for whom studying the law is but the beginning of one's spiritual path, till one advances to studying the inward sciences (al-Kalābādhī, *al-Taʿarruf*, 199-204); likewise for al-Qushayrī, who juxtaposes between the discipline of the Law (*sharīʿah*) and that of True Reality (*ḥaqīqah*), both essential, for Law devoid of spiritual knowledge is empty, and on the other hand, spiritual pursuits must fall within the bounds of the Law. Yet, implicit in his discussion is a clear hierarchy between the two, with the pursuit of *ḥaqīqah* superseding, or rather, enveloping the pursuit of the Law; al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*, 1:195.

reports "according to their own [dimmed] lights."[416]Also, al-Sarrāj considers, and then refutes one particular objection: that one can only be sure of miracles occurring for the Companions at the time of the Prophet, and that these occurred not on behalf of the Companions, but rather on the Prophet's behalf.[417] For al-Sārrāj, this cannot be, for the overwhelming amount of reports prove that such phenomena clearly continued to manifest after the prophet, and they will continue to occur until the end of time.[418] These writers present themselves as faithfully conveying traditions through ironclad sources and suggest a conviction regarding miracles primarily borne from these sources. They thus reveal a culture in which for many, historical attestations to saintly miracles were so innumerable that they could not be doubted.

5.1.2 The Occasionalist Argument for Karāmāt

In his work on *karāmāt*, Gril observes that deep down, Mu'tazilites "understood that the distinction between *mu'jizāt* and *karamāt* is not self-evident."[419] Because, as discussed below, the Muʿtazilites could not discern a distinction of substance between *karāmah* and *muʿjizah*, they could not accept that what was unique to prophets, the

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[416] In other words, they disingenuously explain them away, or instead, flatly reject them as unreliable. That detractors are disingenuous in their methods is of course a subjective assessment; however, he is correct about the Muʿtazilite rejection of such reports, as discussed below; Radtke and O'Kane, *Concept of Sainthood*, 156.

[417] This objection argues that miracles associated with companions in the prophet's time are due not to their charisma, but rather to that of the Prophet; the same argument is made for other miracles discussed in the Qur'ān: the miracles that presented with Maryam were in honor of the Prophet Jesus, and the miracles at Solomon's court were in honor of Prophet Solomon. This objection is mentioned (and refuted) by the Sunnī theologian, Al-Kharkūshī (d. 407/106), who further adds that attributing the miracle that manifests with a saint to some other person (i.e., a prophet) entails the legitimacy of simply associating the *muʿjizāt* that manifest for prophets to others (a result that is presumed unsatisfactory to all parties); Al-Kharkūshī (d. 407/106), *Tahdhīb al-Asrār*, 375.

[418] Al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 323. He adds that miracles that occur for the *awliyā'* in any time are all in honor of the Prophet anyway, for these individuals attain their ranks by virtue of following the Muḥammadan path. Cf. al-Kalābādhiī, who writes, after mentioning the miracles of Maryam and that of Solomon's companion, such may happen in any age, either at the time of the Prophet or otherwise: al-Kalābādhī, *al-Taʿarruf*, 157.

[419] Gril, "Les fondements scripturaires du miracle en islam," 72; my translation.

muʿjizah, would also be accessible to non-prophets. If these concerns were to be sufficiently addressed, one would have to demonstrate that there indeed was a qualitative difference between the *muʿjizāt* of prophets and the *karāmāt* of saints. I would extend Gril's observation and venture to say that for Sunnīs too, the distinction between *muʿjizah* and *karāmah* was not self-evident; instead, it had to be discovered, and then defended.

In the works of Ashʿarī theologians, alongside recognition of historical reports for saintly miracles, the favored argument for the actual possibility of *karāmāt* is one based on God's omnipotence over all events in creation. To explain this argument, we must first recapitulate the occasionalist view which undergirds the claim for God's totalizing agency over what occurs in the world.[420] As discussed in chapter 2, both Sunnī Ashʿarīs and the Muʿtazilah came to view the world through an occasionalist lens which posits that there are no causal forces inherent in phenomena—no *necessary* causal relationship exists between what humans observe as "cause" and "effect." It was the early Muʿtazilite scholar, Abū al-Hudhayl (d. 227/842), that was credited with creating a conceptual framework for later Islamic occasionalism.[421] The occasionalist view developed by the Muʿtazilites and refined by the Ashʿarīs had it that for example, when cotton meets with fire and combusts, it is not this interaction that causes the combustion (for fire, like all things, is empty of any causal force). Instead, God is the causal Agent for all phenomena in the world, such that it is God which causes combustion when the two substances meet.[422] Moreover, Islamic theology came to adopt an *atomistic* occasionalism which had

[420] Here, I summarize the essential tenets of Islamic occasionalism. In greater detail, see Majid Fakhry, *Islamic Occasionalism and its Critique by Averroes and Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 1958), 22-55.
[421] See Ulrich Rudolph, "Occasionalism," 349.
[422] Barring the Muʿtazilite exception for human (moral) acts, which is not directly relevant to our discussion.

it that God is constantly recreating all phenomena. In every instant, God recreates all substances at the sub-atomic level; further, at every moment, He brings the sub-atomic particles together as He so wishes. However, God has a habit (*ʿādā*) with which He intervenes in the world. Thus, where we observe the occasion of combustion when cotton and fire come together on a regular basis, the reason behind this is that God habitually materializes that specific phenomenon when these substances are brought together. This explains the seeming predictability which we observe in natural phenomena. Indeed, it was understood that this regularity was a consequence of God's grace, for without a sense of predictability to the world, human beings would never be able to move about in this world with ease—I could never recline against a wall without feeling safe that my body wouldn't suddenly go through the wall and land flat on the other side, nor could I ever walk on solid ground without worrying about falling through with every step. However, just as God effects all things in the world, it was understood that God could theoretically choose to depart from His habit and effect what, in layman's terms, would appear to be a rupturing of "nature." For both Ashʿarītes and Muʿtazilites, this helps to explain how apologetic miracles for prophets occur.

A second component to Islamic occasionalism besides affirming God as the causal Agent of all phenomena, was to affirm that all things which are not rationally impossible could theoretically be manifested by God. This argument rests on a conception of God's omnipotence as extending to all logical possibilities; as the maxim goes, "whatever is possible in reason is possible for God."[423] It is only that which would involve internal contradiction that God is unable to produce. Thus, one cannot speak of

[423] Fakhry, *Islamic Occasionalism*, 32.

God's ability to manifest a square-circle, or to make a sum of collected parts less than one single part. However, so long as something was logically possible (*mumkin*), it was argued that one must admit God's ability to produce it.[424] Again, resting on an occasionalist view, because God is constantly intervening in the events of the world, creating and recreating at every turn, it is never the fire itself that burns, but rather, God causes combustion whenever it is observed, and it is equally possible for God to do otherwise. The aforementioned Muʿtazilī forebearer, Abū al-Hudhayl is famous for positing certain examples to prove the point, such as affirming it is not impossible for a heavy stone to float in mid-air, since no internal contradiction precludes such an event.[425] Others added, it is not impossible for fire to cool, or that a human being should be the size of a mountain, or that "God might cause a man to burn in fire and still not to experience any pain but instead pleasure." [426] Sunnīs and the Muʿtazilah held this conviction in common. Based on this inherited occasionalism, Ashʿarī's could then move to the affirmation of saintly miracles with the following argument: 1.) miracles do not in and of themselves, entail logical contradictions. 2.) One must ascribe to God the ability to manifest anything that is not a logical contradiction. 3.) Consequently, one must accept that it is possible for God to manifest miracles for the Friends of God. [427] Phrased

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[424] See Fakhry, *Islamic Occasionalism*, 44-48. This is based on the Aristotelian concept of the three modalities of existence: all phenomena, existent and nonexistent, are either necessary (*wājib*), possible (*mumkin*) or impossible (*mumtaniʿ*). In Islamic theology, the first applies to God alone as the only Necessary Existent (*wājib al-wujūd*), the second applies to all things admitted by reason as logically possible, and the third refers to all that which reason does not admit as possible. Ibn Sīna (Avicenna) is credited as the first to systematically adapt Aristotelian thought to Islamic theology in this way for a proof of God as the Necessary Existent. See Michael Marmura, "Avicenna's Proof form Contingency for God's Existence in the *Metaphysics of the Shifā'*," *Medieval Studies* 42 (1980): 337-352; Toby Mayer, "Avicenna's *Burhān al-Siddīqīn*," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 12 (2001): 18-39.

[425] Ulrich Rudolph, "Occasionalism," 349.

[426] For these two examples, see Fakhry, *Islamic Occasionalism,* 32, 46.

[427] This argument appears explicitly in al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*, 2:521, al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, 253-254, and al-Kharkūshī, *Tahdhīb al-Asrār*, 357, 375.

alternatively, the very same God who is responsible for producing all phenomena, including miracles for prophets, must surely be capable of producing miracles for saints.

5.1.3 The Karāmah *as a Private Matter(?)*

For Sunnī theologians, since the *muʿjizah* comes to vouchsafe one's claim to prophethood, it must always be accompanied by such a claim and a challenge (*taḥaddī*) for the audience to reproduce the miracle. When the miracle proves inimitable, the prophet's claim to prophethood is confirmed. The *karāmah*, on the other hand, though manifesting as a sign of one's intimacy with God, need not accompany a claim to sainthood.[428] What's more, whereas a prophet is required to produce miracles and to call attention to them in order to prove his claims to prophethood, many Sunnī theologians write that the saint ought to shy away from priding himself in miracles. As al-Qushayrī explains, "the friend of God must not find repose in a saintly miracle, nor give it any regard."[429] Along with al-Qushayrī, al-Sarrāj and al-Bāqillānī explain that a prophet obeys God in displaying his miracles to prove his prophethood and so hiding his apologetic miracle would be to contravene God; the Friends of God however, are to hide their miracles for fear of self-conceit.[430] To corroborate this, al-Sarrāj cites a handful of

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[428] See for example, al-Bāqillānī, in al-Wanshrīsī, *al-Miʿyār al-Muʿrib*, 11:250-251; ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 420/1037), *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 198-199; al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Bayān*, 48-49. In his al-Bayān, while al-Bāqillānī admits true, nature-bending, sorcery, he adds that God frustrates the attempts of a sorcerer who falsely claims prophethood by means of a miracle. Either God causes him to forget how to perform the miracle or God allows some other individual to perform the miracle, so that it is shown not to be inimitable.

[429] Al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*, 2:522.

[430] Al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ* 318; al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*, 2:524. c.f. al-Bāqillānī: "most of them [i.e., the *awliyā*] deny miracles as coming from them and instead ascribe them to God…and they dislike others seeing it, and guard themselves" for fear of lapsing in their deeds; al-Bāqillānī, in al-Wansharīsī, *al-Miʿyār al-Muʿrib*, 11:251. One exception to this trend is al-Tirmidhī; beyond arguing that the *awliyā* may seek out miracles to confirm their position with God and that their experiences are God-inspired, he also rebuts a certain group who praise the more refined *walī,* the "knower" (*ʿārif*) of God, as one who pays no attention to miracles. For al-Tirmidhī, miracles should be happily sought after and displayed; they are a source of comfort for the Saint, and cannot of necessity, be a source of anxiety (for example, over the onset of self-conceit); see Radtke and O'Kane, *Concept of Sainthood*, 163, 196.

reports wherein respected forebears advanced in their spiritual journey by virtue of disregarding miracles. In one exemplary case, we are told that Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī (d. 234/848 or 261/875) once said, "in my novitiate, the True/Truth (*al-Ḥaqq*, i.e, God) would show me marvels, but I would pay them no mind; when He saw I was this way, He then placed for a me a path toward gnosis of Him."[431] Other stories show the *awliyā'* cautioning others from regarding miracles. On one occasion, to belittle a circulating story of a man who had traveled to Mecca in one night, the aforementioned al-Bistāmī states that even Satan travels from West to East in an instant. He further adds, "Were a man to spread his prayer rug on the sea and sat cross-legged in the middle of the air, then don't be beguiled by him until you see how he fares with respect to God's injunctions and prohibitions." Likewise, once when a disciple of Sahl al-Tustarī informed him that while performing his ablutions, water would flow from his hands to become pieces of gold or silver, Sahl advised, "O beloved, don't you know that when children cry, they are given a rattle to distract them? Beware then of how you proceed."[432] The goal with such stories is to characterize the *karāmah* as at best, a *private* gift targeted to the spiritual development and training of the saint, as opposed to the *muʿjizah*, which has the public as its primary audience; at worst, the *karāmāt* are potential distractions. In fact, al-Sarrāj argues, while prophets increase in their confidence and position with God through their miracles, the Saints increase in fear of God with every miracle, for concern that the miracle might

[431] Al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ* 318; al-Biṣṭāmī himself is considered a representative of the ecstatic, so-called "intoxicated" Sufism.
[432] For the two last preceding examples, see Al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 324-325. For more of such examples, see al-Sarrāj, 324-327.

instead be a test or ruse (*istidrāj*) which God places for the insincere who, taken up by their own seeming powers, eventually fall away from God.[433]

Yet, the *karāmah* is often depicted as having a positive role in the life of the *walī*. Within one breath of stating that the *awliyā'* must not find repose in the *karāmah*, "nor even take notice of it," al-Qushayrī also states that the *karāmāh* strengthens them in certitude and increases their spiritual insight (*baṣīrah*). They realize that the miracle comes from God and so, recognize in it, proof that they are on the right course.[434] As discussed above, for al-Tirmidhī the *karāmah* does not give rise to fear but instead, provides peace of mind to the saint. The *karāmah* is routinely discussed as proof positive, not just to oneself, but also, to others, of a saint's *wilāyah*, and therefore, of his authority in their midst. In line with the standard analogy between the *muʿjiza* and the *karāmah*, just as the former verifies one's prophethood and veracity in his claims, so too does the latter verify sainthood and veracity.[435] This helps to explain why it is often understood that while the saints tend to conceal their miracles, they might reveal them in order to serve some purpose, such as to increase the faith of their companions.

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[433] al-Sarrāj proceeds with many examples of Friends who avoided displaying their miracles, among them the famous al-Junayd, who reportedly stated that "the hearts of the Elect are veiled from God by regarding His favors, taking delight in His gifts, and by relying on miracles." There is also al-Nūrī who once came to find the banks of the Tigris joined together so that he might cross the river, but then swore against ever crossing a river other than by boat. Then there is Ishāq Ibn Aḥmad who died in debt, though he could turn copper into gold and silver; see al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 320-327; for similar views, see al-Kharkūshī, *Tahdhīb al-Asrār*, 374; that God may manifest miracles for the insincere as a test, which results in their self-conceit and pride is confirmed by al-Kalābādhī, *al-Taʿrruf*, 159 (though this is attributed to "some" scholars, so that there is no consensus among the orthodox on this). ʿAbd al-Qāhir. al-Baghdādī even mentions as proof of this, a certain Balʿam Ibn Bāʿūrā who was granted miracles far exceeding those of many others, who nonetheless ended up in a state of spiritual wretchedness (*shiqā'*): al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 199.

[434] Al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*, 2:522.

[435] See al-Kalābādhī, *al-Taʿarruf*, 157; ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037), *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 198-199; al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*, 2:520; al-Kharkūshī, *Tahdhīb al-Asrār*, 374.

The same al-Sarrāj who presents stories attesting to saintly disregard for miracles, follows that with a discussion of certain figures who displayed their miracles to their companions in order to establish their spiritual purity and veracity. Among them was an incident involving Ibrāhīm al-Khawwāṣ who, lost in the wilderness of the desert for a number of days, suddenly came across an individual who knew of his situation. The man asked if he might show Ibrāhim the way and when the latter agreed, the man instructed Ibrāhīm to walk a few steps to the front, and then disappeared. Lo and behold, within a few steps, Ibrāhīm found himself right on the main road.[436] In another case, when one of the saints was questioned about whether he could produce miracles, the saint proceeded to reach into a furnace and retrieve a piece of hot iron with his bare hands. As the saint later explains, he did this, knowing that the questioner's faith was weak, and fearing that if he did not satisfy the questioner's demand for a miracle, his spiritual state might suffer as a result. So, he only displayed his miracle out of love for, and to protect, the questioner.[437] Al-Bāqillānī too, differentiates between the saint who attributes his miracles to himself, intending thereby self-aggrandizement and seeking to exalt himself over others, and the one who displays his miracles in order to encourage others to imitate him in drawing closer and withdrawing to God. The first only affects sainthood and has unfortunately succeeded in his pretensions since others falsely attribute sainthood to his. The second however, is *praiseworthy* for employing his miracles towards drawing others to God.[438]

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[436] Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 328; the point here is that Ibrāhīm has told the story for the valid purpose of establishing the purity of his spiritual state.
[437] Al-Sarrāj, *al-Lumaʿ*, 328-329.
[438] Al-Bāqillānī, in al-Wansharīsī, *al-Miʿyār al-Muʿrib*, 11:251; though al-Qushayrī does not explicitly speak of the saints as revealing their miracles, many of the miracle stories he presents demonstrate the

It is for this reason that many of our writers will also claim true supernatural events cannot manifest at the hands of an imposter who only feigns sainthood. As al-Qushayrī states, marking out the insincere imposter from the sincere saint can only occur through something which the imposter, only posing as a saint, cannot possibly have, and the *karāmah* is precisely that.[439] As al-Kalābādhī explains, if there be no distinction between that which God bestows on the Saints, the *karāmāt*, and those deceptions which He allows His enemies to endure, then this entails that

> He might treat His saints as He does His enemies: He might even curse His prophets and put them at a distance from him...and this cannot be said of God. And, if it were possible for the enemies (of God) to display the markers of sainthood and the signs of election (*al-ikhtiṣāṣ*), and if the pointers (*dalā'il*) to sainthood did not in fact point to it, there would be no guide to truth whatsoever.[440]

The upshot then is that one expects God to manifest clear markers of distinction for those closest to Him, which must be unique to them, so that the gifts which are particular to the saints cannot manifest for the unbelievers or for pretenders to sainthood. The Sunnī writer, ʿAbd al-Mālik Al-Kharkūshī (d. 407/1016), says just as much in his *Tahdhīb al-Asrār*, arguing that to admit miracles can manifest for imposters and unbelievers is to admit that God is incapable of demarcating for us humans, his true representatives from the false, a result that would be unsatisfactory to all parties.[441] What is implied in al-

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display of miracles in full view of others, often to teach some lesson about God, or about His relationship with the Friends. We have already seen the case of Jābir al-Rahbī who silenced skeptics by riding into town on a lion. There is however a true ambivalence in al-Qushayrī; in one report, the saint, Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Nūrī, declared at sea, "By your Might (O God), if a three-pound fish does not come to me, I will drown myself!" after which a fish showed up. Al-Junayd, after hearing the story, explained, "It would have been better for him that a snake come out of the water to bite him." Apparently, al-Junayd disagreed with al-Nūrī's theatrics. See al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*, 2:532.

[439] Thus al-Qusharī, *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*, 2:520. So too, al-Bayhaqī, *Kitāb al-Iʿitiqād*, 307.

[440] Al-Kalābādhī, *al-Taʿarruf*, 181.

[441] Al-Karkhushī, *Tahdhīb al-Asrār*, 374-375. Likewise al-Qusharyī, *al-Fuṣūl fī-l-Uṣūl*, for which, see Richard M. Frank, "Two Short Dogmatic Works of Abū l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī. Second part: Edition and

Kharkūshī's claim, as with al-Kalābādhī, is that God has obliged us to follow the lead of his agents on earth (the prophets and the Friends), and so, God must necessarily present a means for us to distinguish between those who are truly His agents, and those who are false; the miracle, whether the *muʿjizah* or the *karāmah*, serves that purpose; the *muʿjizah* is to prophethood as is the *karāmāh* to sainthood in the sense that were these gifts admitted for others outside these ranks, our ability to distinguish between the highest representatives of God (prophets and saints) and others (especially false prophets and pretenders to sainthood) would fall. Just as God takes it upon Himself to distinguish the prophets from others via a grace unique to them, i.e., the *muʿjizāt*, so too, it is argued, He may distinguish the *awliyā'* via gifts unique to them, i.e., the *karāmāt*.

5.1.4 Sleight of Hand in the Muʿjizah-Karāmah *Distinction*

Despite protestations that the *muʿjizah* has precedence over the *karāmah*, early Sunnī theology reflects an ambivalence regarding distinctions in kind between the two. There is a desire to affirm that any given saintly miracle may parallel a miracle that has been recorded for a prophet, and yet, this is challenged by a desire to preserve the supremacy of certain prophets by virtue of miracles unique to them. For al-Kalābādhī, a consensus exists among the Ṣūfīs that the miracles of the saints may mirror any of those belonging to the prophets, including "walking on water, conversing with beasts, 'folding

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Translation of "al-Fuṣūl fī l-uṣūl," *Mélanges de L'institut Dominicain d'Études Orientales* 16 (1983): 87-88; not all Sunnīs in this period reject the ability of nonbelievers displaying miracles. Both al-Bāqillānī and al-Juwaynī admit that nonbelievers too can display true supernatural acts. In his *Kitāb al-Bayān*, Al-Bāqillānī argues that though sorcerers can display marvels, these do not always match those of the prophets and moreover, these marvels cannot coincide with a claim to prophethood; in the event that a sorcerer seeks to display a supernatural act *while* also claiming prophethood, God thwarts his efforts by various means. Barring these limitations however, a sorcerer can perform all sorts of true extraordinary acts, including taking flight in the air, causing love, hatred, and illness in others by way of sorcery, etc. As he states, "it is incumbent that we not exclude anything from the domain of sorcery except those things which are inadmissible by consensus and by unambiguous and unimpeachable prooftext (*tawqīf*)." See al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Bayān*, 91-98; al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, 255-257.

the earth' (*ṭayy al-arḍ*, i.e., traveling to a distant place instantaneously), or bringing forth an object outside of its (normal) place or time."[442] Further analysis reveals difficulties that arose in advancing this position. Al-Juwaynī for example acknowledges that certain scholars from his own (Sunnī) camp reject for the Saints particularly remarkable miracles associated with certain prophets, including the transformation of Moses' staff to a serpent, his parting the sea, and the ability to restore life (as attributed to Jesus). Among those we can find to advance this view are al-Kharkushī, al-Qushayrī, and arguably, al-Kalābādhī himself. Al-Kalābadhī, for his part, first states that saintly miracles may mirror the *muʿjizāt*,[443] but then states, "the miracle of the saint may involve an answer to prayer, or the completion of a spiritual state, or power to perform [an act], or obtaining the subsistence that is due to them," while the marvels accorded to prophets consist either of producing something from nothing, or of changing the essential nature of an object.[444]

While al-Kalābādhī admits saintly miracles *might* mirror those of the prophets, in the above quote, he also wants to establish that the more striking miracles are typically reserved for the prophets. Where we might expect a saint's prayers to be answered with ease, or for the straitened saint to miraculously stumble upon a much-desired pond in a barren dessert, it is at the hands of the prophets that we might expect, for example, a transmutation of substance (such as of a wooden staff to a snake) to occur. Not much besides this is mentioned by al-Kalābādhī on substantive differences between the two categories of miracles. In his work, al-Kharkushī similarly states that the Friends do not produce some miracles of the prophets of old. Here, he mentions specifically, the splitting

[442] Al-Kalābādhī, *al-Taʿarruf*, 156.
[443] Al-Kalābahī, 156.
[444] Al-Kalābādhī, 160.

of the moon and the Heavenly Ascension (both of Prophet Muhammad), Moses' speaking with God at Mount Sinai, Jesus' reviving dead, and a Qur'anic story wherein four dead birds from various locations come back to life and return to Abraham at his call;[445] unfortunately, al-Kharkūshī also does not offer much of an explanation for these exceptions to *karāmāt*, save for, "such things do not manifest for the Saints."[446] Al-Qushayrī takes a similar position when he states (again with little explanation),

> Know, that today it is definitively known that among the many things that God may cause to be (*maqdūrāt*), there are some which, by necessity (*ḍarūrah*), or close to that, may never appear in the form of saintly miracles. These include the emergence of a human being without two parents and the transformation of an inanimate object into a beast or an animal; there are many of such examples.[447]

The two examples mentioned are, respectively, references to Jesus's miraculous birth, and the staff of Moses which transformed into a snake. As with the other two scholars, no explanation is provided for these exceptions, or for how to determine which of the ancient miracles are exclusive to prophets alone. However, al-Qushayrī does state that

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[445] Al-Kharkūshī, 373; the last is discussed in Qur'ān 2:260. The dominant reading of this verse is that upon Abraham's request to God that God show him how He revives the dead, Abraham is instructed to cut up four birds, place their dismembered parts on separate mountains, and then call for them, to find them all return to him whole. This has long been the dominant reading in the exegetical tradition but was never the only reading. A second interpretation also advanced by few authorities in the early period read the verse as instructing Abraham to train the birds to respond to his call, as an analogy for God's ability to call all humans back to him. For a recent discussion on both readings, see Sohaib Saeed, "Fights and Lights: Two Underrated 'Alternatives' to Dominant Readings in *Tafsīr*," *Journal of Qur'ānic Studies* 24, no. 1 (2022), 46-48. Saeed argues for the second as the intended meaning of the Qur'ān.

[446] Al-Kharkūshī, 373. He also adds that the miracles of the prophets persist after them, while those of the saints die with them. Again, the author does not explain beyond this; it is likely however that he has the Qur'ān in mind as a lasting miracle of the Prophet Muhammad. Finally, he has it that the *karāmāt* manifest subsequent to the *walī*'s concerted effort, whereas the *muʿjizāt* are not produced of spiritual exertion on the part of the prophets, but simply manifest without antecedent cause.

[447] Al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*, 2:523. elsewhere, al-Qushayrī reports Sunnī disagreement on whether the *karāmāh* can include the vision of God in this world and expresses that the better position is that it cannot; this follows from his view that the better position concerning whether the countenance of God is beheld in this world at all in the first place (his view is that it cannot). This is in agreement with the broader Ashʿārī view, as indicated by al-Qushayrī himself, that the vision of God occurs in the next world, as opposed to in this one; al-Qusharyī, 2:524. See for example, the reputable theologian, al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277), later explaining that the vast majority of Sunnīs had it that the Vision of God occurs not in this world, but in the next: Abū Zakriyyā Yaḥya Ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī, *al-Manhāj fī Sharḥ Muslim Ibn al-Ḥajjāj* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1973), 3:15.

assenting to this doctrine is based on necessary knowledge ("or close to that"), i.e., that knowledge which sound theological reasoning finds impossible to deny. In other words, for al-Qushayrī, accepting such miracles for the Saints conflicts with foundational principles of dogma in some crucial, unacceptable way.

We are left to intuit that those most awe-inspiring marvels strongly associated with the careers of the greatest prophets must be unique to them, and this is likely due to the honor reserved for certain prophets of old in the Islamic tradition. Both Moses and Jesus are at the center of Islam's two sister Abrahamic traditions, Judaism and Christianity, not to mention the unique nature of miracles associated with them (e.g., Jesus has the exclusive honor of being that prophet who reanimated the dead). Likewise, the Heavenly Ascent was such an essential part of the narrative that grew up around the Prophet that al-Karkhushī is unwilling to accept any other figure could share in this experience. Therefore, what these scholars seek to establish is a qualitative difference between the *muʿjizah* and the *karāmah* in order to preserve a superiority in kind, at least for certain *muʿjizāt.*

However, when Ashʿarī thought on the omnipotence of God is fully considered, such exceptions should be unacceptable. Technically, such events are rationally conceivable in the Ashʿarī view, so that nothing should stand in the way of God's manifesting them for saints. Thus, while recognizing difference of opinion on this question, the influential Ashʿarī theologian, al-Juwaynī, states firmly that "the acceptable position, in our view, is that *any and all* ruptures of the natural order" may occur as *karāmāt*.[448] Once again, to defend this view, al-Juwaynī can rely on God's omnipotence

[448] This discussion on al-Juwaynī is drawn from Al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, 251.

as categorical: any instance of effecting the extraordinary is possible for God (so long as it does not entail a logical absurdity), and all are equally within God's power, so there is no justification in placing limits on God with respect to the kind of miracles He may effect for saints and/or prophets.[449] Further, these Sunnī theologians argue, in no way do such miracles prove the challenge posed by prophets false. Recall that Sunnīs and Muʿtazilites agree that the failure of a prophet's audience to reproduce that prophet's miracles vouchsafes his veracity (*ṣidq*) and credibility. For al-Juwaynī, that saintly miracles mirror such prophetic miracles does no damage to the prophetic challenge, so long as they do not occur at the time of the said prophet. Besides, as all agree, many of the prophetic miracles are not unique to one prophet alone. So, the challenge presented by a prophet is to prove that no one in his midst (and therefore, open to rejecting that prophet) can reproduce his miracle, *not* that no single person ever can produce it.[450]

Indeed, there is even an awareness that at least experientially, some of the *karāmāt* are more wonderous than those attributed to prophets, especially Prophet Muḥammad. In other words, some of the saintly marvels seem to surpass their prophetic counterparts in wander. Though the Prophet has miracles of his own, we do not have him as of yet, befriending and commanding lions, walking on water, or turning stone into gold at will, as we do for figures like Sahl al-Tustarī. Thus, al-Qushayrī addresses a question raised by objectors: how is it possible that some saintly miracles seem to border on, or even surpass those performed by the Prophet? One approach to dealing with this anxiety

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[449] This view was also shared by al-Bāqillānī before him; see al-Wansharīsī, *al-Miʿyār al-Muʿrib*, 250; and al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Bayān*, 48-49. This became the dominant view in later Sunnism, adopted by the likes of al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277) and al-Zarkāshī (794/1392). Both reputable theologians of later Sunnism wrote against excluding certain prophetic miracles from the *karamāt*. See al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ Muslim*, 16:108; Muḥammad Ibn Jamāl al-Zarkashī, *Tashnīf al-Masāmiʿ bi Jamʿ al-Jawāmiʿ*, eds. Sayyid ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz and ʿAbd Allāh Rabīʿ (Cairo: Maktabat Qurṭuba, 1998), 4:794.

[450] Al-Juwayni, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, 202.

is to argue that all *karāmāt* are but extensions of the *muʿjizāt*. As al-Qushayrī explains, in the tongue of the fame mystic Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. c. 234/848), "what the prophets receive is as a water-skin full of honey, from which sweats a drop [of honey]. This drop contains all that the Saints receive [of miracles]." That is, the *karāmāt* originates in and emanates from the *muʿjizāt*, so that a clear hierarchy between the two is preserved.[451] It is only because a *walī* follows the spiritual path laid out by the Prophet that he reaches intimacy with God, thereby enabling the manifestation of *karāmāt*. Al-Sarrāj argues the same, stating that the miracles apportioned to the Friends of God are all in honor of the Prophet, for these miracles manifest only by virtue of their being from his nation of Believers.[452]

5.2 The Muʿtazilite Response to *Karāmāt*

5.2.1 Al-Tanūkhī on Karāmāt*: Ṣūfīs as Predatory Charlatans*

In his *Nishwār*, al-Tanūkhī reveals his intense distrust in the Ṣūfīs by frequently painting them as dullards who fool the public with their wacky displays of fake miracles. They are at best, fools taken up by their own delusions, and at worst, experts in trickery and affected wisdom, whose absurdist views and conduct have infected all levels of society, from the caliphal palace to the common streets. In what follows, I focus on how al-Tanūkhī's scorn for the Ṣūfīs appears in his treatment of the wonder-working saints that attract laypeople. Unfailingly, the impression he gives of his day is that in great cities like Shiraz and Baghdad, laypersons are being swindled by pretenders to saintly power. Alongside presenting specific incidents of purportedly wonder-working saints, al-

[451] Al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*, 2:523
[452] Al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 323; a similar claim is made by al-Kharrāz (286/899); *Rasā'il al-Kharrāz*, 188-189.

Tanūkhī also exposes the tricks these "saints" use to deceive others, to demonstrate that they are purely masters at prestidigitation. What's more, as with our other texts, he too presents the sources for each vignette in the *ḥadīth* form (mentioning his immediate source, and the chain of transmission prior to that) in order to gain our confidence in his reliability.

Another story speaks of "the Ṣūfī Shibli" (d. 334/946),[453] who according to al-Tanūkhī's reports, would often perform an act similar to that mentioned earlier: he would introduce his hand into a hot cauldron containing boiling hot flummery, and then take out some morsels to eat. Al-Tanūkhī then proceeds with a short invective against the "silliness" of this strange Ṣūfī (al-Shiblī) "who used to pull out the hair of his head" (presumably out of feigned spiritual ecstasy). In one case, a source for al-Tanūkhī, the vizier, Abū Muḥammad al-Muhallabī, informs al-Tanūkhī that he once saw a crowd in the streets of Baghdad gathered around al-Shiblī who was lying prostrate. After al-Muhallābī inquires about the matter, he learns that al-Shiblī had just earlier passed by a gruel-vendor whose crier called out, "How long will you be deceived?" Al-Muhallabī is astonished, and queries other Ṣūfīs present about what has just occurred; when they explain that "he believes God is addressing him on the tongue of the crier," he states, "How strange;" suppose another crier opposite the first exclaimed the same at the same time, he asks "Which of the two would be the word of God?"[454] The point of course is to show what al-Tanūkhī takes to be the absurdities of a certain cohort of Ṣūfīs claiming

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[453] Abū Bakr al-Shiblī is a well-respected early master in the Ṣūfī tradition. He is particularly known for his ostensibly sacrilegious ecstatic utterances and his perceived excesses in asceticism. Al-Qushayrī for example, who praises al-Shiblī as a master, speaks of his limitless self-exertion in his novitiate. We are told that he would rub salt into his eyes in preparation for night vigils, that sleep not overtake him; al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*, 1:116.

[454] Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-Muḥāḍarah*, 2:128-129; see also the analysis in Sobieroj, "The Muʿtazila and Sufism," 82-83.

intimacy with God, the same sort who deceive the public with their stunts. Also important is that al-Tanūkhī's source for this story is none another than the state Vizier, who himself was a member of the influential Muhallabī family.[455]

5.2.2 The Case of al-Ḥallāj: Spiritual Master or Trickster

Though al-Tanūkhī presents a handful of accounts discrediting saintly miracles, unsurprisingly, the figure who receives the most treatment as a charlatan is Abū al-Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), the most controversial Ṣūfī in Islamic history who had only recently been executed by the state a mere two decades before al-Tanukhi's birth, reportedly on the pretext of his blasphemous teachings.[456] The standard narrative in latter-day Sufī tradition is that he was brought to trial for his ostensibly sacrilegious utterances, the most damning of which was his claiming himself to be God ("I am the True"), though critical scholarship on earlier sources reveals a different picture.[457]

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[455] K. V. Zetterstéen and C. E. Bosworth, "al-Muhallabī," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 7:358; Patria Crone, "Muhallabids," in *The Encylopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 7:358-360.

[456] Al-Ḥallāj was originally a disciple of the acclaimed Ṣūfī, Sahl al-Tustarī (discussed above) and later became a disciple of the Baghdādī tradition. He then broke away from the Baghdādī tradition and took to his own path which adopted a political activism that did not sit well with his Ṣūfī masters. He then traveled far and wide as an independent, popular preacher and thaumaturge, amassing disciples wherever he visited, including Khurāsān, Transoxiana, and India. He spent the last two decades of his life in Baghdad and attracted many supporters and detractors. Among those who supported him till his end was the aforementioned al-Shiblī. For al-Ḥallāj's life and thought, see Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj, Mystic and Martyr of Islam*. 4 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972-1986); Louis Massignon, *Hallaj: Mystic and Martyr-Abridged Edition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1994); Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 68-82.

[457] Due to the machinations of political and religious enemies, al-Ḥallāj spent nine years under house arrest at the caliphal court and was eventually put to death in 309/922 on the charge that he preached the substitution of the ritual obligation of pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) with a private pilgrimage using a replica of the *kaʿbah* in one's own courtyard. Later, the popular telling has it that he was executed for utterances which identified with Divinity. However, early reports suggest that the perception of al-Ḥallāj as a political threat was at the center of his execution. Al-Ḥallāj's advocacy for social and moral reform, his reputation among some of his followers as the axis (*qutb*) of existence by his followers, and his condemnation of prevalent inequities infuriated religious and political authorities in the ʿAbbāsid capital of Bahgdād. Further, he was equally successful at gaining powerful followers as he was influential detractors. On the one hand, he could count among his supporters many in the caliph's entourage, including the caliph's own mother (Shaghab). On the other hand, he had formidable enemies in notable statesmen, the most determined of which was the Sunnī governor of Wāṣiṭ, Abū Muḥammad Ḥāmid, who later presided over al-Ḥallāj's trial. Between these

Regardless of the exact details of the trial, al-Ḥallāj was by all accounts, an influential peripatetic figure in his day who inspired much conversation by virtue of his acclaim as an advanced mystic and wonderworker. In the memorialized image of al-Ḥallāj we find in Ṣūfī works, he is at best, a misunderstood mystic whose truths went beyond the apprehension of most so that his death could be perceived as tragic; at worst, he acts with negligence in revealing a knowledge which, though true based on his spiritual experiences, is inappropriate for public consumption. It is clear however that al-Ḥallāj remained a bone of contention for opponents of Sufism, especially the Muʿtazilah, even after his death; in his work al-Tanūkhī makes a concerted effort to disabuse his reader of the notion that al-Ḥallāj was true and sincere, and that his miracles were genuine. So too, the chief jurist of the Ḥanafī school of Islamic jurisprudence in Baghdad, Abū Bakr al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 370/981), himself associated with the Muʿtazilite school, seeks to present al-Ḥallaj as a charlatan in his Qur'ānic exegetical work, the *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* (Rulings of the Qur'an). Later, al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025), takes up the mantle in his theological summa, *al-Mughnī fī Abwab al-Tawḥīd wa al-ʿAdl* (The Compendium on the Topics of Unity and Justice), wherein ten pages in modern print are dedicated to exposing the devices al-Ḥallāj resorted to in his deceptions.[458]

According to these Muʿtazilite works, al-Ḥallāj would move from place to place and draw credulous townsfolk, especially those desperate for healings, into his sphere of influence. Not only is al-Ḥallāj presented as a self-promoting fraudster, but he is also shown to have had delusions of grandeur. In the *Nishwār*, al-Tanūkhī reports from one of

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two factions, in the end, his enemies won out. For one version of the trial's proceedings, see al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, 1:162-165. See also Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy,* 102-110; Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 77.

[458] ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, 15:270-278.

his sources that when al-Ḥallāj came to Baghdad, he would actively seek to recruit individuals under his influence and in so doing, would lead many astray, including people of social standing (*al-ru'asā'*).[459] This source goes on to explain that al-Ḥallāj would capitalize on the weaknesses of people to have them bestow on him various titles, including those of spiritual "sovereign" (*bāb*; lit. "gate/entryway"), "the Prophet," or worse yet, God Himself.[460] In one case, we are told, al-Ḥallāj sent an attendant of his to a scholar, Abū Sahl Ibn Nawbakht,[461] in hopes of seducing him to his ranks. Unfortunately for al-Ḥallāj, this scholar was "timid, prudent, and intelligent," and was aware that wonders of the acclaimed mystic could very well result from trickery. He thus sought to put al-Ḥallāj to the test, presenting himself to al-Ḥallāj as a sincere inquirer. Abū Sahl then complained to al-Ḥallāj of his baldness, a nagging insecurity which had stood in the way of his consorts with women, forcing him to "to let the hair of my pate grow long and pull it down over my brow, fastening it with my turban." Abū Sahl challenged al-Ḥallāj to cause his hair to grow, and to restore the color to his grey beard without the aid of a dye, and should he succeed, Abū Sahl agreed to recognize al-Hallāj by the titles of "'viceroy' or 'sovereign,' or 'prophet' or even 'Almighty [God].'" Apparently, al-Ḥallāj was not up to this particular challenge, and so, gave up his pursuit of Abū Sahl.[462] In this

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[459] Notice here the inclusion of people of standing. It must be emphasized that the act of seeking out miracles was far from unique to commonfolk alone, and included individuals of all classes. Al-Tanukhī, *Nishwār*, 1:161.

[460] Al-Tanūkhī, 1:162.

[461] Abū Sahl Ismāʿīl Ibn ʿAlī al-Nawbakhtī (237/852-311/924), a member of the prominent Nawbakhtī family, and an influential Shīʿī scholar and theologian in his own right. His prominence among the Shīʿah was, according to al-Tanūkhī, al-Ḥallāj's primary motive for targeting the scholar, in hopes that recruiting the Shīʿah would advance his standing; al-Tanūkhī, 1:161; On al-Nawbakhtī, See Wilferd Madelung, "Abu Sahl Nawbakti," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 1:369; an updated version is available online at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/abu-sahl-esmail-b.

[462] We are also told that al-Ḥallāj sent emissaries ahead of him to prepare the way for his welcome; after their work was completed, they reported to him, "We have sown for you in each land what will grow there; some have accepted to call you the The Gate (*Bāb*)...others the Possessor of Revelation (*ṣāḥib al-*

report, al-Tanūkhī manages to show that while al-Ḥallāj may be able to dupe many, he can still be outwitted by those who are wise to his scams.

In another interesting case, an astrologer had heard of all the wonders of al-Ḥallāj and was curious to investigate. He thus disguised himself "in the character of a religious inquirer" and visited his circles. When al-Ḥallāj instructed him to speak of anything he desired, that al-Ḥallāj may bring it about for him, the man proceeded to request fresh fish, which should have been difficult to come by in their barren region. Al-Ḥallāj then proceeded to his home to pray God for his request. After some time, he returned, "having evidently waded in muddy water up to his knees," with a fish squirming in his hand. Al-Ḥallāj claimed to have traveled from within his house to the marshes to catch the fish upon instruction from God, but the astrologer, sensing that trickery was afoot, asked if he could enter to inspect his house, and if he saw no sign of deceit, he would believe him, to which al-Ḥallāj agreed. As he expected, the astrologer came to find a room secreted away in a hidden section of the house, wherein al-Ḥallāj had a large garden of various kinds of vegetables (some out of season), storerooms for all sorts of foods, and a pond in which was an abundance of fish, large and small. Finally, to protect himself from al-Ḥallāj whom he feared might very well kill him should he show any intention of exposing the fraudster, the astrologer took the more cautious option of feigning belief in al-Ḥallāj's miracle.[463]

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nāmūs)...others the Lord of the Age (*ṣāḥib al-zamān*)...and others He Himself." Al-Tanūkhī explains what each of these indicate: The Bāb (gate/door) is glossed as Sovereign, the Lord of the Age as a Shīʿī messianic figure, the Lord of the Age as a Prophet, and of course, the last refers to God. Reportedly, these letters were presented as evidence of al-Ḥallāj's heresy in the trial against him. Al-Ḥallāj apparently repudiated these letters, denouncing them as forgeries. See Al-Tanūkhī, 1:161-162.

[463] True or not, the report clearly intends to show the extreme lengths to which such individuals were expected to keep up the charade. Strangely enough, the man's plan to feign belief fails; as he exited al-Ḥallāj's place, he had unwittingly kept hold of a large fish from the pond, which al-Ḥallāj saw; when al-

Another important scholar shown to have exposed al-Ḥallāj was the great Muʿtazilī, Abu ʿAlī al-Jubbā'ī (d. 303/915).[464] In the city of Ahwāz, after many had been deceived by al-Ḥallāj, Abū ʿAlī explained to the people that he must have a storehouse from whence he produces his materials, and so advises that the people make al-Ḥallāj enter one of their houses as opposed to his own before making their requests; after hearing of this, al-Ḥallāj quickly departed from the town.[465] In another case, al-Ḥallāj deceived onlookers to believe that he had managed to go without food or drink for a month. Al-Tanukhī's direct source and friend, Abū al-Faraj Ibn Rawḥān, a devout traditionist and himself a Ṣūfī (according to al-Tanūkhī), explained how al-Ḥallāj might have managed the feat. According to Ibn Rawḥan, his brother-in-law Qasrī (who happened to be al-Ḥallāj's attendant) would affect extended periods of fasting through trickery. As Ibn Rawḥān explains, after much practice and discipline, Qasrī learned to manage without food for about fifteen days, and when the fifteenth day came, those scrutinizing the "saint" would have failed to detect any trickery, and so they slowly let down their guard, becoming increasingly disarmed till they just about neglected scrutiny of his actions altogether, allowing the charlatan the opportunity to do as he pleases.[466] At

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Ḥallāj attacked him, the man managed to escape with his life. At that point, al-Ḥallāj yelled to him from behind that he must take care to conceal his secret, lest al-Ḥallāj ensure his death. The man knew well that al-Ḥallāj might carry out his threat through one of his followers, so he kept the story until after al-Ḥallāj's execution. Al-Tanūkhī, 1:165-168.

[464] Himself, after studying with Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf (a pioneer of the Muʿtazilite school), became the leader of the Basrān school of Muʿtazilite thought, and was succeeded by his son, Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā'ī (d. 321/933). On this period in Muʿtaziliate history, and the influence of these two scholars, see Sabine Schmidtke, "The Muʿtazilite Movement (III): The Scholastic Phase, in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 159-165.

[465] Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, 1:172.

[466] Al-Tanūkhī, 1:159; such severe austerities were often associated with certain renowned mystics. For example, a student of al-Tustarī's reports that he would undertake a period of intense ecstasy for seventy days during which he would not eat anything; he would order his companions to eat meat once a week so they could maintain enough strength to worship, yet he himself would become weak whenever he ate. Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, 88.

that point, the charlatan's aid manages to smuggle him food that had been pounded into a thin leaf, cleverly hidden within two leaves of a rolled up notebook. When no one is watching, Qaṣrī consumes the food, and rinses his mouth as he performs ritual ablutions. This amount sustains him for another fifteen days or so, until food must once again be smuggled in. Moreover, we are told that Qasrī continued this practice even while imprisoned with other followers of al-Ḥallāj.

By establishing such a minimal degree of separation between himself and the event, with al-Tanūkhī being a single person removed from al-Ḥallāj's attendant, it is clear that the author here, as in throughout the section on al-Ḥallāj, seeks to inspire confidence in his sources, and in this case, to present unimpeachable evidence of al-Ḥallāj's quackery.[467] Though our Muʿtazalite sources painstakingly seek to present the duplicity in saintly miracles as obvious, there is a clear concern for the hold such miracles have on their societies. It was not only commonfolk that were drawn to saintly miracles, but also people of influence, including caliphs and their entourages. Reportedly, al-Ḥallāj's ability to perform miracles for the family of the caliph (al-Muqtadir), including curing the caliph of fever at one point, and more dramatically, restoring the crown prince's favorite parrot to life at another point, won him favor with the royal family, most especially with the Queen Mother, Shaghab.[468] This support proved instrumental in

[467] Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, 1:159-160.

[468] Al-Tanūkhī, 6:80; this reliance on the supernatural at the caliphal court was not unique to al-Muqtadir. Chroniclers also widely report that even before him, his father, al-Muʿtaḍiḍ Billah (r. 279-89/892-902), enlisted a number of enchanters to cleanse his palace of a menacing figure who appeared at night in various forms. This he did, al-Jaṣṣāṣ explains (disapprovingly), "in spite of his dignified rank and his sagacity." After finding that the figure in question was beyond the reach of his palace guards, as it would seem to disappear before they could grab hold of it, and fearing that the figure might cause harm to befall them, the caliph employed an enchanter whose fame relied on his expertise with communicating with the Jinn. In the end however, this came to no avail, for when the recruited enchanter demonstrated his "abilities" by pretending to have caused the possession of a companion who had previously agreed to play along, the

delaying the outcome of the case eventually brought against al-Ḥāllāj at all stages: trial, judgment, and execution.[469]

Since the early period of their formation and continuing into the time of ʿAbd al-Jabbār, most of the Muʿtazilah roundly rejected *karāmāt al-awliyā'* as a rule.[470] This rejection was part of a wider program that denied extra-prophetic supernatural acts generally—in this view there is no essential distinction between the marvels, for example, of an enchanter, a magician, or a wonder-working saint, as all are equally false. Thus, al-Jaṣṣās puts al-Ḥallāj's marvels as belonging to the same category as the works of enchanters. As he explains, Al-Ḥallāj is like those who falsely claim to have command over the Jinn by uttering God's divine names, so that they can influence feelings of love and exorcize the jinn from the possessed.[471] We have also seen that the wonder-working saints are characterized as imposters who use their tricks to dupe the ignorant masses into accepting their claims of grandeur, including in some cases, claims to prophethood. It is this, the notion that via the miracles, the purported Friends of God succeeded in unjustifiably attracting the audience of people, that seemed to have most troubled the Muʿtazilah.

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caliph saw the ruse for what it was. According to al-Jaṣṣāṣ, the mystery of the unknown figure is solved only later during the reign of al-Muqtadir Billāh (r. 295-320/908-32): al-Jaṣṣāṣ is informed by a friend of al-Muqtadir that the unknown figure was in fact, a servant who took on various disguises in order to meet with his lover, a slave girl who had worked in the caliph's harem. Aḥmad Ibn ʿAlī Abū Bakr al-Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Qamḥāwī (Beirut: Dār al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1985), 1:57-58. Cf. Zadeh's treatment of this incident: "Commanding Demons and Jinn," 134.

[469] Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 75-76.

[470] For example, the 6th/12th century Muʿtazilite theologian, al-Malāḥīmī (d. 536/1141) informs us that the two great masters of the Muʿtazilah, Abū ʿAlī and Abū Hāshim, alongside their "companions" (e.g., their disciples), rejected miracles for the saints. As I discuss in the next chapter, this began to change around ʿAbd al-Jabbār's time; Maḥmūd Ibn Muḥammad al-Malāḥimī, *Al-fā'iq fī ūṣūl al-Dīn*, ed. Faīṣal Badīr ʿAwn (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub wa al-Wathā'iq all-Qawmiyyah, 2010), 374.

[471] Al-Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, 1:57; See Zadeh, "Commanding," 138-139, Travis Zadeh, "Magic, Marvel, and Miracle in Early Islamic Thought," in *The Cambridge History of Magic and Witchcraft in the West: From Antiquity to the Present*, ed. David J. Collins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 143-146.

5.2.3 A Summary of the Muʿtazalite Concern

It matters little whether the Friends *actually* claimed prophetic authority, as al-Ḥallāj is accused of so doing, and we can be sure that most did not—most Ṣūfīs were also part of the Sunnī movement, and so accepted that theoretically, the authority of the Prophet could not be superseded. Nonetheless, the Muʿtazilites were concerned that Ṣūfīs attributed their miracles to the Divine and thereby claimed to be consummate representatives of God, which, as they inferred, was tantamount to occupying the role of prophets. As we have seen, the *awliyā'* were understood as having attained an unparalleled intimacy with God which enabled them to become vessels for God here on earth, for God spoke and acted through them. Further, the *karāmāt* were the most visible indication of their intimacy with God. For the Muʿtazilah, this smacked of sacrilege, as it essentially placed the *awliyā'* on par with the prophets, especially because both the Muʿtazilah and the Sunnīs had come to agree by the third/ninth century that the apologetic miracle (*muʿjizah*) was the single, conclusive proof of one's claim to prophethood. In truth, both factions had clearly come to see a close relationship between miracles, spiritual authority, and hidden knowledge, and the Muʿtazilah were concerned that allowing the *karāmāt* presented a risk of confusion between prophets and non-prophets. The Muʿtazilite argument was, since it is through miracles that the prophets vouchsafe their speaking for God, to accept God-given miracles for any other human is to accept that they too speak for God. To put it another way, because miracles are that by

which prophets are distinguished from others, if miracles are accepted for non-prophets, then there would be no sure way to distinguish between them and others.[472]

There is another intuitive aspect of this argument: the wonder inspired by the apologetic miracle is significantly diminished if saintly miracles are admitted, for if in reality they occur as commonly as reported, then their occurrence render the extraordinary ordinary, and makes humans less inclined to regard the prophetic miracles with wonder.[473] Unlike other indicators of prophethood (piety, trustworthiness, and other moral qualities) which are common to other individuals, all parties accept that it is precisely the extraordinary events surrounding Muḥammad that was most decisive in establishing his prophethood; it is this that definitively silences the naysayers, because of its distinctive, unparalleled nature; so, the Muʿtazilah argued, once miracles are accepted in abundance, those for the prophets lose their uniqueness. In other words, if in fact *karāmāt* always existed for all sorts of righteous individuals, even at the time of the Prophet, then the miracles wrought by the Prophet would surely have been less striking to the mind of the pagans, for they would not have marked the Prophet as any different from all those others who displayed miracles. For these reasons, it was inconceivable for the Muʿtazilah that God would produce miracles for any non-prophets.

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[472] ʿAbd al-Jabbār cites Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā'ī as primarily responsible for formulating the function of *muʿjizāt* in this way. For ʿAbd al-Jabbār and the Muʿtazilah, the best of Prophet Muḥammad's miracles was the inimitability of the Qur'ān; ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, 15:217-218. See also Yusuf Rahman, "The Miraculous Nature of Muslim Scripture: A Study of ʿAbd al-Jabbār's *Iʿjāz al-Qur'ān,*'" *Islamic Studies* 35, no. 4 (1996): 409-24.

[473] ʿAbd al-Jabbār, 15:217; also the Muʿtazilite, Abū ʿAlī Muḥammad Ibn Khallād (d. 350/961); see Camilla Adang, Wilferd Madelung, and Sabine Schmidtke (eds.), *Baṣran Muʿtazalite Theology: Abū ʿAlī Muḥammad b. Khallād's Kitāb al-Uṣūl and its reception. A critical Edition of the Ziyādāt Sharḥ al-uṣūl by the Zaydi Imām al-Nāṭiq bi-l-ḥaqq Abū Ṭālib Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn b. Harūn al-Buṭḥānī* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 161.

Though as aforementioned, the Muʿtazilah admit God's omnipotence includes the ability to manifest all logical possibilities, both Sunnīs and the Muʿtazilites also recognize that God places limits upon Himself, which are discoverable via reason. For example, both parties accept that among those limitations is that God does not manifest inimitable miracles for false claimants to prophethood. The Muʿtazilah extended this by arguing that God would not manifest miracles for non-prophets at all, and that all paranormal acts that manifest at the hands of all other humans must be false.[474] The apologetic miracles of the prophets are truly inimitable, thus proving that they result from divine power, whereas the tricks performed by others, magicians and "saints" alike, are learned and repeatable, known by those who are skilled in the art of illusions and prestidigitation. Without this, they argue, the *muʿjizah* can no longer serve its function as conclusively distinguishing between the prophet and the non-prophet. It is for this reason that al-Tanūkhī, al-Jaṣṣāṣ, and ʿAbd al-Jabbār insist on exposing the ways of the wonderworkers, with the latter dedicating pages to the minutiae of the tricks used by al-Ḥallāj. ʿAbd al-Jabbār essentially sees this as a duty upon him; as he reasons, the more deceptions of charlatans are exposed, the less wonder they inspire in commonfolk.[475]

5.2.4 Muʿtazilite Rejection of Miracle Narratives

One evident motive in using direct witnesses to expose the thaumaturges as frauds in the works of al-Tanūkhī and ʿAbd al-Jabbār is to counter the evidentiary force of narratives supporting them, which clearly began to dominate the social scene. The Muʿtazilah were well-aware that they were in the minority in their categorical rejection of *karāmāt* reports, the abundance of which proved compelling for most. ʿAbd al-Jabbār

[474] ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, 15:192, 15:234.
[475] ʿAbd al-Jabbār, 15:27.

presents an objection from the perspective of his interlocutor: how can one deny that miracles occur for other than prophets, given their wide occurrence is securely established by historical reports reaching the point of *tawātur* (transmitted widely and independently),[476] thus providing unimpeachable evidence for their occurrence? ʿAbd al-Jabbār has a layered approach to this problem. As he explains, one must either claim that the reports corroborate that which is already accepted as necessary knowledge (*al-ʿilm al-ḍarūrī*),[477] or that we are compelled to accept them because they are *mutāwātir* (massively transmitted with independent chains),[478] or lastly, that they fall short of the conditions of *tawātur* and thus do not yield epistemic certainty.[479]

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[476] ʿAbd al-Jabbār, 15:225. *Tawātur*, with its related adjective, *mutāwatir*, are technical terms in Islamic epistemology that refer to reports about the past (whether prophetic traditions, or simply historical accounts) that are so widely and independently transmitted that they could not be forged. Such reports are thought to yield epistemic certainty. Though the concept of *tawātur* itself was widely accepted, there was considerable debate on its conditions and its application in theology, *ḥādīth*, and law. For example, there was much disagreement regarding how many narrators in each generation of transmission could give rise to *tawātur*, with opinions ranging from four to seventy (for ʿAbd al-Jabbār, the required number is five). See also Jonathan A.C. Brown, *Hadith: Muḥammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009), 104-106; Huseyn Hansu, "Theology," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Hadith*, 249-260.

[477] *Al-ʿIlm al-Ḍarūrī* translates literally to "necessary knowledge" but may be more effectively rendered as "immediate knowledge." It is one of two major divisions of knowledge in Islamic theology, the other being acquired knowledge (*ilm muktasab*), which one arrives at through ratiocination. "Necessary knowledge" is that sort which arises in the individual without effort, that is, without having to resort to discursive reasoning for it simply impresses itself upon the mind of the individual; it is thus that knowledge which is supposedly common to all individuals of sound intellect and need not depend on (but can agree with) revelation. As one would expect, there was in fact much debate about the nature of "necessary knowledge." For ʿAbd al-Jabbār in particular, this knowledge could be divided into the following: perception of facts external to the person (e.g., my perception that there is a chair in front of me), introspective perception (e.g., my perception of my own contentment), and rational intuition (e.g, my intuiting absent revelation that wrongdoing is always evil, the intuitiveness of this being itself a particularly Muʿtazilī view). On Necessary Knowledge in Islamic thought generally, see Binyamin Abrahamov, "Necessary Knowledge in Islamic Theology," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 20, no. 1 (1993): 20-32; for ʿAbd al-Jabbār's view, see ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughī*, 12:59-76, 15:331-341; cf. Mānkdīm Shashdīw, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, 768; see also George Hourani, *Islamic Rationalism: The Ethics of ʿAbd al-Jabbār* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 20-24; Maha Elkaisy-Freimuth, *God and Humans in Islamic Thought*, 55-56.

[478] For ʿAbd al-Jabbār, like most of the Muʿtazilah and Sunnīs, massively transmitted (*mutawātir*) knowledge also gives rise to necessary knowledge. For example, it is by virtue of the overwhelming attestations to China's existence that I simply "know" that China exists without having ever visited. ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, 15:331-333; cf. Mānkdīm Shashdīw, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa*, 768.

[479] For most, any tradition which falls short of the conditions of *tawātur* (whatever they may be) falls under the category of *āḥād* (i.e., narrated by solitary individuals). Such traditions were thought to only yield

First, he argues, it cannot be that the occurrence of saintly miracles amounts to "necessary knowledge," i.e., that which is immediately admitted by all those of sound mind and is not susceptible to doubt. The very fact that this is a matter of debate between reputable theological schools nullifies the argument based on "necessity."[480] Second, the claim that the abundance of reports reaches *tawātur* (i.e., unimpeachably wide and varied transmission) is flatly denied. For ʿAbd al-Jabbār, most of the reports are dubious, or at best, are of low epistemic value, and thus do not yield *certain* knowledge.[481] To better understand this objection, we might consider the common example of one's certainty that a particular foreign land exists despite never having witnessed this land herself, because of the innumerable attestations thereto (at the level of *tawātur*) from direct witnesses. My unyielding certainty in the existence of China, though I have never visited, arises due to my awareness of the innumerably varied testimonies of witnesses thereto, far and wide, who it would be inconceivable to assume have all colluded to conspire against me in fabricating their experience of China. With respect to saintly miracles however, ʿAbd al-Jabbār is protesting to justification by way of *tawātur* because *tawātur* in this case requires that there exist an *irrefutably* paranormal act at the hand of a saint which is itself, reported by multiple direct witnesses. The paranormality of such acts is, however, debatable, given what we "know" of the devices employed by charlatans. Besides, in many cases, defenders of *karāmāt* are merely accepting what they have heard from

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probable knowledge (at best), and so, their place in building theology was debated. See Hansu, "Theology," 251; Brown, *Muḥammad's Legacy*, 103-106. The general view among the Muʿtazilah, as represented here in ʿAbd al-Jabbār, was that such reports were not epistemically reliable for building creed, which, they argued, should only be founded on irrefutable knowledge. Reportedly, ʿAbd al-Jabbār had it that *āḥād* narrations were valid for law (in other words, ritual worship can be justified in such traditions), but not for theology, because the epistemic threshold for theology is higher than that for law (this was not an uncommon view among theoreticians). Mānkdīm Shashdīw, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa*, 769.

[480] ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, 15:25; see also Hourani, *Islamic Rationalism*, 22-23.

[481] ʿAbd al-Jabbār, 15:225-226.

others; rarely have they actually witnessed the miracles they report. There is much truth to his objection; many of the saintly miracles, including those I discuss above, are simply vouched for by the saint who has purportedly performed the miracle. It is hardly the case in this early period that we have multiple witnesses reporting one miracle en masse. Even worse, ʿAbd al-Jabbār states, on occasion, miracles are reported of persons who themselves are reported to have denied miracles.[482] Lastly, miracles are often reported for purported saints who in fact, are known clowns and imposters, or even heretics.[483] Of course this itself is a subjective assessment; where al-Shiblī is an imposter for ʿAbd al-Jabbār and his colleagues, he is in the Ṣūfī tradition, a paragon of spiritual mastery. Plainly stated, we would not expect ʿAbd al-Jabbār to trust as reliable, the reports of those whose weak intellects (in his estimation) are betrayed by their attraction to such Ṣūfīs in the first place.

Besides, ʿAbd al-Jabbār states, should saintly miracles be true, and should they serve to vouchsafe one's position with God, why then were they not reported in abundance for the Companions? ʿAbd al-Jabbār is clearly aware that there is a wealth of reports on miracles occurring in generations well after the Prophet, and that the rate of miracles seems to increase as the years go by. It is argued that miracles are meant to accompany those who are most beloved to God. So, ʿAbd al-Jabbār observes, it seems odd that God would not provide them with equal abundance for the greatest of all human beings after the Prophet, namely, the Companions, whose unparalleled spiritual ranks we

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[482] ʿAbd al-Jabbār, 15:226; ʿAbd al-Jabbār doesn't mention specific names, but this is an accurate observation. For example, it is reported that Sahl al-Tustarī often challenged miracles attributed to him. In one case, when people credited him with walking on water without getting his feet wet, to disprove this, he directed them to the muezzin who once saw him as he fell into a pool and proceeded to rescue him. See al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ,* 292; Karamustafa, *The Formative Period*, 40.
[483] ʿAbd al-Jabbār, 15:226.

can be certain of; why would God provide miracles for figures who pale in comparison to the Companions, whose spiritual achievement is often dubious at best (again for ʿAbd al-Jabbār, many of the acclaimed wonder-working "saints" lauded by the populace are in fact, frauds).[484] In reality, ʿAbd al-Jabbār is skeptical of the few miracles attributed to the Companions in the first place. He recognizes for example that there are a few reports of miracles specifically for notable Companions (Umar and ʿAlī especially). As we would expect, he is suspicious of these reports, and adds that if indeed God provided miracles for these great Companions, then why did miracles fail to appear for them in times of utmost urgency, e.g., in moments of intense conflict between the Companions, so that the miracle could prove once and for all who was in the right? For example, during the internecine conflicts between ʿAlī and Muʿāwiyah (discussed in Chapter 1), why did God not simply cause miracles to manifest at the hands of ʿAlī to prove to the populace that he was the rightful Caliph, and thus invalidate Muʿāwiyah's claim to rule?[485] Surely, *karāmāt*, which are said to prove the virtue of the one who receives them, would have proved useful at such a dire moment, as it would have eliminated the need for war. Certainly, he explains, this would have freed the two sides from having to resort to

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[484] ʿAbd al-Jabbār, 15:241; his characterization of a remarkable paucity in reports for *karāmāt* among the Companions is accurate, given that the Companions number in the tens of thousands, and that miracles are widely reported for only a handful of them.

[485] ʿAbd al-Jabbār, 15:241. ʿAbd al-Jabbār clearly takes a stance on this conflict. It is to be noted that the first four Caliphs hold pride of place in the Sunnī tradition as *al-Khulafā' al-Rāshidūn* ("The Rightly Guided Caliphs"). Among the classical positions on the origins of the Muʿtazilah within the tradition, one posited that they originate in a group who withdrew (*iʿtazala*) from making a judgment regarding ʿAlī and Muʿāwiyah; in other words, as opposed to those who expressly supported one or the other of these two parties, the early Muʿtazilah took a neutral position. On this reading, the Muʿtazilite claim that the grave sinner is neither a true Believer nor a non-believer, but instead, is in an "intermediate position" between the two, originates in their early stance for an "intermediate" position between ʿAlī and Muʿāwiyah. Whether or not this accurately traces the genealogy of this characteristically Muʿtazilite doctrine, it is clear that by ʿAbd al-Jabbār's time, the principle of "The Intermediate Position" is no longer beholden to that early neutrality. On the relationship between the civil war and the Muʿtazilī "Intermediate Position," see Watt, *The Formative Period*, 216; c.f., Massimo Campanini, "The Muʿtazila in Islamic History and Thought," *Religion Compass* 6, no. 1 (2012): 42.

arbitration (*taḥkīm*), which itself resulted in the heresy of the *khawārij*, who wreaked havoc in the early Islamic community.[486] Moreover, why should miracles appear for the likes of so-called saints like Shaybān al-Rāʿī (d. 158/775),[487] Maʿrūf al-Karkhī (d. 200/815),[488] Bishr al-Ḥāfī ("the Barefoot," d. 277/842),[489] and Sahl al-Tustarī,[490] but not for the likes of earlier, more accomplished luminaries in the development of Islamic thought, like Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyab (d. 94/713) and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728).[491] Note that all these personalities are mentioned by name in ʿAbd al-Jabbār's work; in other words, ʿAbd al-Jabbār is familiar with the legends surrounding the aforementioned Ṣūfī personalities. Their mention is deliberately calculated to compare legendary figures in Ṣūfī history often associated with miracles to earlier figures who all would consider

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[486] The *khawārij* (singular: *khārijī*) were a group who arose in defiance of Alī's acquiescence to arbitration, arguing that arbitration has no authority when what is right is categorically clear. Alī's submission to the process of arbitration, they argued, is tantamount to admitting that the rule of God is open to arbitration, thus their slogan, "Judgment belongs to God alone." The *khawārij* were also associated with the heretical view that one who sins, in so doing, forfeits her belonging to the community of Believers community, i.e., is no longer a Muslim, a view roundly rejected by Islamic theologians. For a brief discussion on the Khārijites, see Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 7-13.

[487] Al-Qushayrī narrates a story in which Shaybān is accompanied by the Syrian scholar, Sufyan al-Thawrī, and when the two come across a lion, Shaybān instructs Sufyān not to be afraid, and then Shaybān takes the lion by the ear and rubs it, after which the lion wags its tail. In another, the famous jurist Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal intends to reveal Shaybān's ignorance so that he would busy himself with knowledge, but when he asked Shaybān a question on a technical matter of ritual, the wise response presented by the latter caused Aḥmad to faint. Al-Qushayrī presents Shaybān as an unread (*ummī*) Ṣūfī and asks, if an illiterate Ṣūfī can have such wisdom, what then of their masters in Sufism? It is no coincidence that Shaybān is posited against the traditionist, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, by way of once again demonstrating the superiority of Sufī wisdom over any other; see al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*, 2:542.

[488] A renowned mystic of Baghdād; al-Qushayrī states that his grave was a tried and tested source of healing. al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*, 1:42.

[489] A native of Marw who flourished and died in Baghdad; see al-Qushayrī, 1:48-50.

[490] ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, 15:241. ʿ

[491] Ibn al-Musayyab was one of the reputed "Seven Jurists" of Medina, the teachings of whom were formative in the development of Islamic legal theory in that region. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī is an important figure lauded within all of the Sunnī sub disciplines. The exact nature of his theology is disputed as he was claimed by both Sunnīs and the Muʿtazilah alike. As a pious ascetic, he was also eventually co-opted by the Ṣūfī tradition as well. See Suleiman Ali Mourad, *Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī*; Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims*, 93-95. Abd al-Jabbār is also relying on a dominant reading of history within the Islamic tradition which envisions the first generations of Muslims as superior to all that follow. The phrase commonly used by Sunnīs and Muʿtazilites alike for this most exemplary generation of Muslims, *al-salaf al-ṣālīh* ("the pious forebearers"), is applied by ʿAbd al-Jabbār to the figures he praises. On the development of "the pious forbearers" as a concept, and its role in and past and present struggles to define Islam, see Asma Afsaruddin, 148-182.

greater in status. It is implied that all would agree to the superiority of these earlier figures, whose knowledge was more indispensable than that of those who came later, particular because of their expertise in prophetic precedent, and their significant contributions to Islamic thought generally. Since *karāmāt* are meant to verify for the public, the righteousness of those to whom they are bestowed, then, ʿAbd al-Jabbār argues, defenders of *karāmāt* consistently insult the wisdom of God by implying that He would refuse to manifest miracles for the aforementioned scholars of old and yet, bring about miracles for the less deserving.

Ultimately, for ʿAbd al-Jabbār, any argument based on received knowledge about previous incidents of saintly miracles is inadmissible because at the foundation, saintly miracles themselves are inadmissible. We may thus summarize the Muʿtazilī argument against *karāmāt* as follows: 1.) The presence of a miracle is the primary criterion by which a prophet is marked out from others 2.) consequently, miracles cannot occur for non-prophets, for these conflicts with the notion that miracles distinguish prophets from others. 3.) Further, there is an underlying concern that those who claim saintly miracles will present as having prophetic authority, or at the least, an authority adjacent to that; as such, they will command more influence among the populace than they are due.

5.3 Conclusion

A number of issues arise upon analysis of the Sunnī defense for *karāmāt*. For one, that the Friends do not take pride in their miracles and instead tend to conceal them seems to conflict with the claim that the *karāmāt* are justified by an overabundance of reports relaying them. It also conflicts with analogizing the *karāmah* to the *muʿjizah* with respect to the function of both in confirming the position and authority of their beneficiaries. A charitable reading might resolve this tension by arguing that while God has His own

objectives in causing miracles to manifest, i.e., serving to validate for the *walī* his spiritual progress, the *awliyā'* nonetheless view their miracles as a burden and a source of temptation. However, that they should be perceived as burdensome to the point of inducing fear is challenged by the perception of the *karāmāt* as manifestations of God's special grace, and a source of comfort for the *awliyā'*. It seems rather likely that the emphasis on a preference for concealing miracles at least partly intends at rebutting accusations of arrogance and self-promotion on the part of the Friends, alongside the claim that self-styled saints, by virtue of their miracles, seek to command the same authority due unto the Prophet. Sunnī theologians understand that the primary objection against *karāmāt* is that, for the Muʿtazilah, *karāmāt* diminish the importance of *muʿjizāt*, and Sunnī theology seeks various ways to demonstrate this is not the case. To this end, one must both affirm that miracles manifest as a special grace of God for the Friends, and yet, that the Friends do not show miracles any regard. In theory, Sunnī theology posits a conflicted position for the *karāmāt*, yet this is not sustained in view of the enthusiastic affirmation of *karāmāt* in the same works.

In navigating the various arguments presented by advocates for *karāmāt*, ʿAbd al-Jabbār suggests that the advocates perform a sleight-of-hand of their own when they attempt distinctions between the *muʿjizah* and the *karāmah*. As he argues, they cannot escape ultimately characterizing the *karāmah* so that it is essentially the same as the *muʿjizah*. In the end, theirs is but a distinction in terminology, not in substance because at the core, the *muʿjizah* and the *karāmah* are one and the same: ruptures from customary nature that manifest to vouchsafe the spiritual rank and credibility of their

beneficiaries.[492] To ʿAbd al-Jabbār's point, most of the Sunnī works argue that the *karāmah* may mirror prophetic miracles (even if they make certain exceptions), and further, both al-Juwaynī and al-Bāqillānī frankly state that the *muʿjizah* and the *karāmah* are in of themselves, the same. For the latter two scholars, there is nothing inherent in the miracles of either category that distinguishes them; instead, they are distinguished by their different accompanying factors. Sunnī theology then, must, and does accept that what is said to demarcate true prophets from imposters is not so unique to prophets after all. For Sunnīs, it was not simply the presence of a miracle that defined prophethood, but also, the miracle *alongside* a claim to prophethood, and a challenge to others to reproduce that miracle, barring which, the claim must be accepted. On the other hand, the *karāmah* appears as a sign of a saint's *wilāyah* and to prove the veracity of his teachings, though it cannot accompany a claim to prophethood, nor does it technically oblige its audience to submit to the teachings of the saint. Formulated in this way, Sunnī theology sought to save the adoption of *karāmah* while also safeguarding the uniqueness of the *muʿjizah*.

[492] ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, 15:242.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.1 Sufism as Mainstream: The Popularity of the *Awliyā'* in the Middle Period

Though Sunnī theologians, who had accepted the fact of the *awliyā',* also formally accepted the practice of visiting graves in order to remember God, the dead (and death itself), and to recite the Qur'ān, other popular rituals clearly aimed at sacralizing and drawing from the sanctity (*barakah*) of the saint provoked controversy.[493] The influential Ḥanbalī jurist and theologian, Ibn ʿAqīl (431-513/1039-1119) exemplifies those concerned for what was perceived as heretical practices affiliated with saint shrines. In hopes of obstructing the path to personality worship, he offers a detailed list of practices to be avoided at grave sites:

> kindling lights, kissing the tombs, covering them with fragrance, addressing the dead with (one's) needs, writing formulae on paper with messages such as: "Oh my Lord, do such and such for me:" taking earth from the grave as a blessing, pouring sweet fragrances over graves, setting out on a journey for them...[494]

The suggestion of course is that the listed practices were performed by at least some of the laity. It is clear that such practices result from a complex of beliefs surrounding the charisma of the Friends of God. No wonder then that the medieval scholar, Ibn Qudāmah (d. 620,1223), accused Ibn ʿAqīl and "his faction" of denying miracles for the *awliyā'*, and states that as a result, "not a single one among them can gain a foothold in sainthood…nor will any among them be able to claim a miracle." For their rejection of

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[493] On opposition to *ziyārah* culture, see Christopher Taylor, "'Idolatry and Innovation': The legal attack on Ziyārat Al-Qubūr," in *In the Vicinity of the Righteous: Ziyāra and the Veneration of Muslim Saint s in Late Medieval Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1999) 168-194, and Josef Meri, *The Cult of Saints Among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 126-138.

[494] Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Ighāthat al-Lahfān fī Maṣāyid al-Shayṭān*, ed. Muḥammad ʿUzayr Shams (Riyad: ʿAṭā'i'āt al-ʿIlm, 2014), 1:353; translated in Meri, *Cult of Saints*, 129 (translation retained here minor modifications).

the *karāmāt*, they are intensely hated in this world, and they will be tortured in the next. None among them will prosper, nor will he succeed in following right direction."[495]

As is evident from Ibn Qudāmah's tone, which echoes the confrontational tone in al-Tirmidhī's polemic against the "scholars of the outward sciences," pilgrimage (*ziyārah*) culture was always challenged by formidable scholars. Nevertheless, in spite of sustained controversy, saint cults continued to flourish from the sixth/twelfth century well into premodernity, as evidenced by the proliferation of pilgrimage guidebooks, shrines, and visitation sites throughout this period.[496] Though the saints were venerated for their mastery of praiseworthy traits including detachment, generosity, and sincerity, the hagiographical evidence demonstrates that "the most important criterion of whether a person merited the status of sainthood was the manifestation of evidentiary miracles, followed closely by mediation and intercession."[497]

Another important development in the popularization of Sufism was the transformation of the Ṣūfī master from a teacher of few disciples to becoming a Shaykh for the public. As aforementioned, Sufism was initially an orientation that attracted few Muslims, and was thus characterized by a pietistic elitism; yet, Ṣūfī masters gradually exposed themselves to the public and began to address fellow believers of all kinds; in

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[495] ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Aḥmad Ibn Qudāmah, *Censure of Speculative Theology*, ed. and trans. George Makdisi (London: Gibb Memorial Trust, 1962), 11; Ibn Qudāmah, *Kitāb Taḥrīm al-Naẓr fī Kutub al-Kalām*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ibn Muḥammad Saʿīd Dimashqī (Riyadh: ʿAlam al-Kutub, 1990), 41. Cf., Meri, *Cult of Saints*, 72. We are unable to confirm the accusation against Ibn ʿAqīl, as his doctrine on *karāmah* does not appear in his extant works ; yet, it seems highly unlikely that Ibn ʿAqīl would have denied *karāmāt* altogether, given that even the staunchest critics of Sufism among the Sunnīs at the time had to affirm *karāmāt* as part of Sunnī theology. What we have here is likely a case of hyperbolic polemics. The strident tone taken by Ibn Qudāmah further corroborates the importance of the *awliyā'* and their *karāmāt* for those who identified with them.

[496] See Karamustafa, *The Formative Period of Sufism*, 131-132. Also, Christopher Taylor, *In The Vicinity of the Righteous*, 86.

[497] Vincent Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, 112. Cf. Daphna Ephrat, *Spiritual Wayfarers*, 131.

the words of one observer who disapproved of this trend, Ṣūfī lodges were increasingly frequented by all sorts, "the poor and the affluent, the righteous and the corrupt [literally, unruly] alike."[498] In explaining this allowance, the Ṣūfī master Ibn Arslan (d. 840/1440) reasoned that the lapsed Muslim would turn away from her sins through companionship with the righteous.[499] This relaxation on the strictures of affiliation to Sufism was acknowledged and sanctioned by major Ṣūfī figures in the period, including Abū al-Najīb al-Suhrawardī (d. 563/1168).[500] In his *Kitāb Adāb al-Murīdīn* (Treatise on the Etiquettes of the Seekers), the Shaykh relaxes the level of commitment expected of the disciple (*murid*, lit. "aspirant/desirous"). While he recognizes that many predecessors would scoff at admitting dispensations in the Ṣūfī path, he also argues that earlier authorities accepted that dispensations were necessary for the so-called "truthful simulators" among disciples, to be distinguished from those who are fully committed to the Ṣūfī path. The former were "simulators" in the sense that they had a genuine desire to commit to the Ṣūfī way but were not yet disposed to do so. In the past, such dispensations included, as Karamustafa explains, "the possession of an estate or reliance on a regular income, owning a business, carrying food during travel, [and] dance during *samāʿ* [musical audition]."[501] In other words, such dispensations would allow a curious urban laborer, for example, to still aspire to Sufism. Thus, the popularization of Sufism was also due to a reciprocal relationship between the populace and the formulators of Ṣūfī thought—popular

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[498] Ephrat, *Spiritual* Wayfarers, 153.
[499] Ephrat, 154. Ibn Arslān was among those most influential in introducing the Qādīrī *ṭarīqah* (Ṣūfī order) in Palestine. On his legacy, see Ephrat, 154ff.; also, Daphna Ephrat, "The Shaykh, the Physical Setting and the Holy Site: The Diffusion of the Qādirī Path in Late Medieval Palestine," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 19, no. 1 (2009), 1-20.
[500] Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, 151.
[501] Karamustafa, 151. See also Erik Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition: ʿUmar al_Suhrawardī [d. 632/1234] and the Rise of the Islamic Mystical Brotherhoods* (Leiden, Brill, 2008), 226-248.

religiosity served Sufism, and Sufism developed to serve the masses. The same is confirmed in Ephrat's study of Palestinian Sufism, in which she observes that there were at least two circles around the Sufī Shaykh, a wider circle of casual visitors who primarily sought to benefit from the Shaykh's *baraka*, and a circle of more committed disciples.[502] Ephrat's study further corroborates the embrace of informal observance as evidenced by the emergence of new customs which allowed for lay participation. Moreover, this resulted in promoting the stature of the Friends of God.[503]

Throughout the centuries, there were always those more critical of widespread practices associated with Sufism, including how *karāmah* and *barakah* were sought. This movement would find its greatest inspiration in Ibn Taymiyyah (661/1263-728/1328), an illustrious, or notorious figure, depending on where one stands in the Sunnī tradition. Ibn Taymiyyah was a vociferous critic of both the populace and the religious establishment in his day, for which, he inspired the ire of influential figures, resulting in his imprisonment several times over.[504] In particular, Ibn Taymiyyah, lambasted those who visited the tombs with the intention that,

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[502] Ephrat, *Spiritual Wayfarers*, 152

[503] Ephrat, *Spiritual Wayfarers,* 132. See also Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, 153.

[504] For his contemporaries, Ibn Taymiyyah was a fanatical provocateur who, in the words of one critic, had a screw loose; he was persistent in his antagonism towards the perceived heresies taught by the religious intelligentsia, which, he argued, misguided the populace. His activism would cause him trouble time and again, landing him in prison several times over. Ironically, whereas Ibn Taymiyyah was perceived by his contemporaries (and most Sunnī traditionalists after him) as an overzealous rabblerouser, Ibn Taymiyyah would later be vindicated in modernity by Salafī Sunnī groups as the role model for reform. On his thought and the controversy surrounding his legacy withing the traditional-religious literature generally, see essays in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, ed. Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010). On Ibn Taymiyyah's role in defining Ḥanbalī school of law after him, see Abdul Hakim al-Matroudi, *The Hanbali School of Law and Ibn Taymiyyah: Conflict or Conciliation* (London: Routledge, 2006).

> His supplication be fulfilled at the tomb or that he would supplicate the deceased, and seek aid (*yastaghīth*) through him (i.e., the deceased) and make a request of him or take an oath (abjure) by God through him in requesting a need[.][505]

In other words, Ibn Taymiyyah takes issue with intercession through the dead. For Ibn Taymiyyah, it is not the living that benefit from the dead, rather, the dead benefit from the living who pray for them.[506] One who performs intercession, he argues, is essentially guilty of polytheism, for s/he places her hopes in the saint, as opposed to in God. Ibn Taymiyyah also took aim at popular attitudes toward *karāmāt*. To be clear, there is little to suggest that critics like Ibn Taymiyyah dismissed *karāmah* as a concept in and of itself, as this was by now, a stable doctrine in Sunnism.[507] Thus, it was not belief in the extraordinary marvels of the saints that troubled these critics, but rather, what they saw as misplaced attraction and reliance on the *karāmāt* on the part of the laity, which, they found, was bound up generally with an excessive attachment to the *awliyā'* that went against the unparalleled commitment and reliance due unto God. Those who criticized the place of *karāmāt* did so not by rejecting *karāmāt*, but rather, by seeking to place further limits on their influence. One approach to this was to criticize the blind acceptance of miracles without assuring that those who displayed them lived in accordance with the dictates of Islam.[508] Besides, they argued, supernatural events manifest for all sorts, the

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[505] Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Qāsim (Medina: Mujmaʿ al-Malik Fahd, 1995), 27:31-32. I have modified the translation in Meri, *Cult of the Saints*, 130; where Meri translates *yastaghīthu* as "supplicate for rain," (an acceptable choice, as this is the more immediate meaning of the Arabic), I opt for the secondary meaning of the word, "to seek aid," as *istighāthah* was eventually used to refer to the general phenomenon of seeking aid (not exclusive to rain) through the mediation of saints.

[506] Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmuʿ*, 27:71; Meri, *Cult of Saints*, 131.

[507] Karamustafa observes too that even the most vehement critics of *ziyāra* practices were unanimous in their affirmation of *karāmāt*; Karamustafa, *The Formative Period*, 131-132. Ibn Taymiyyah himself, the poster figure for criticism of Sufi culture, firmly affirms miracles of the saints as present "till the Day of Judgment"); Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-ʿAqīdah al-Wāsiṭiyah*, ed. Abū Muḥammad Ashraf Ibn ʿAbd al-Maqṣūd (Riyadh: Aḍwā' al-Salaf, 1999), 123.

[508] On Ibn Taymiyyah's reflections in this vein, see Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmūʿ*, 11: 213-214; Meri, *Cult of Saints*, 69;

sincere and the insincere alike. Afterall, most Sunnīs accepted that true sorcery performed by the insidious existed so, it was argued, it was not sufficient to regard the miracles of a purported *walī*, but to go beyond this to examine the conduct and teachings of that *walī* in order to see if the individual could be regarded as a true saint.[509]

6.2 The Problem of Miracles in the Post-Enlightenment Age

In spite of protestations from certain corners, interest in the saints and their *barakah* continued to be a central element of Islamic religiosity. Against this backdrop, the domination of Sufism into popular Muslim life, and the veneration of charismatic personalities would have seemed a permanent fixture of Islam in premodernity, and indeed, various authors would continue to compile the miracles of the great saints throughout history.[510] As we have seen, this belief in saintly miracles emerged in large part due to a wider intellectual paradigm that accepted the possibility of divinely-inspired supernatural events, including and especially for prophets alongside the saints, and for most of Islamic history, this perspective largely went unchallenged. It was not until the encounter with post-enlightenment thought in the era of Western expansion into Muslim lands that the very possibility of the supranatural returned once again to the fore of

[509] Ironically, Ibn Taymiyyah was himself likely an object of popular veneration. Reportedly, in his lifetime, Damascenes would drink the water with which he performed his ablutions, and after his death, the water with which his corpse was washed was collected. See Josef Meri, *Cult of Saints*, 105. Meri cites the account of Ibn Taymiyyah's reported in Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmad Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī (d. 744/1343), a*l-Uqūd al-Durriyāh*, ed. Muḥamamd Ḥāmid al-Fiqī (Beirut: Dār al-Kātib al-ʿArabī, 1970), 385-387. This work celebrates the praiseworthy traits (*manāqib*) of Ibn Taymiyyah. It is worth noting that the author dies less than two decades after Ibn Taymiyyah, so that regardless of the veracity of his account, the legendary stature of Ibn Taymiyyah is already in full swing soon after his death.

[510] For a list of general works on *karāmāt* composed throughout Islamic history, see Brown, "Faithful Dissenters," 166-168. For how one of the most influential Ashʿārī theologians classified extraordinary acts, see Tariq Jaffer, "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's [d. 606/1210] Taxonomy of Extraordinary Acts," in *Light Upon Light: Essays in Islamic Thought and History in Honor of Gerhard Bowering* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 349-365.

Muslim intellectual discourse, beginning in the eighteenth, but most especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The resurgence of this issue, long ago settled in Islam, must be understood within the context of a seemingly sudden reversal of fortunes in Muslim experience. It must be remembered that Muslims at this time and thereafter were writing during a period in which Islamic lands were increasingly colonized by western powers. As Muslims considered various reasons for their situation, there emerged a new group of intellectuals, commonly branded Islamic modernists in western studies, who argued that the dominance of, and in turn their own subjugation to, the West, was aided by Western ways of thinking identified with the enlightenment and post-enlightenment eras. On the other hand, the modernists argued, Muslims had exposed themselves to subjugation by falling into a state of progressive intellectual decline since the middle period of Islamic history; where the West advanced in their intellectual pursuits, the Muslims, as they saw it, turned their backs on intellectual rigor, which God calls to in revelation, and which was the hallmark of Islam in its early days. As opposed to placing reason as their guide, they succumbed to irrational ways. More besides, Muslims had fallen into a fideistic traditionalism which bound them to accepting inherited teachings and practices without question, where the Europeans took skepticism and critical investigation of received knowledge as an obligation. If Muslims were to return to their position of great standing, if they were to stand a chance in resisting or reversing their subjugation, they would have to defy the traditionalism that had become so characteristic of Islam as they knew it, and would have to develop the will to consider anew, the epistemic value of all received teachings, investigating the extent to which these teachings stand up to rational

scrutiny.[511] This perspective was furthered by European assessments of Muslims as "backward, tyrannical and unreasonable," and "unable to respond to modern challenges," and the colonization of Muslim lands was partly justified on that basis; Islamic modernists were determined to rise to this challenge.[512]

One dominant current in Islamic modernism took the form of harmonizing Islam with the products of the modern western sciences, including advancements in the understanding of fundamental processes in the natural world and concomitantly, developing knowledge on the laws of nature. One of the consequences of this appreciation for the scientific understanding of nature was that miracles would have to be addressed on the grounds of this new method of reasoning about the world. If the natural world is grounded by causation based in certain unalterable laws, as modern science teaches us, how then can we account for miracles which, by definition, are characterized by supposedly impossible ruptures from these laws? Whatever side one came down on in response to this question, the very fact that the matter was addressed with renewed vigor was due to Islam's encounter with Western Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment

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[511] The Muslims had begun to fall into decline long before the modern period was already a popular view among Muslim intellectuals by the end of eighteenth century; this view was taken to various ends. In what follows, I discuss how Islamic *modernists* conceived of the problem and how to address it. Later, I will touch on another approach to the problem, that of the Salafīs. On the widespread sense of decline among Muslims and various presentations of its causes, see Andrew Rippin, "*Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 174-283.

[512] Muhammad Khalid Masud, "Islamic Modernism," in *Islam and Modernity: Key Issues and Debates,* eds. Muhammad Khalid Masud, Armando Salvatore, and Martin van Bruinessen (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 240-241; as with Muslim reformers, Orientalists too commonly held the view that after a period of impressive intellectual endeavor in early Islamic history, Muslims had begun to fall into decline, with the eleventh century and the activities of al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) receiving the largest share of blame for this turn. Recently however, the "decline thesis" has been questioned, so that it is now a matter of considerable debate in academic circles. For discussions on the thesis, see Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: Scholarly Currents in the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1-10; and, Ahmet Kuru, *Islam, Authoritarianism, and Underdevelopment: A Global and Historical Comparison* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 104-118. El-Rouayheb's is intended as a corrective to the decline thesis; Kuru challenges el-Rouayheb (and the like) and supports the decline thesis.

thought on nature. In what follows, first I address the controversy which arose in modernity surrounding miracles attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad, and then turn to a similar controversy concerning saintly miracles.

Muslim interest in demonstrating their beliefs were "rational" (the understanding of which was of course, culturally determined) was not new; what was new was that "rationality" now had to be considered in light of the reality of Western expansion. Given the political supremacy of the West, and the identification of political supremacy with *intellectual* supremacy, what counted as "rational," for many Muslim writers, was refracted against the Western concept of the rational; when this wasn't the case, Muslims still tended to uphold their beliefs in consideration of, and in opposition to Western thought. This was directly reflected in new concerns to defend the Prophet and the myth associated with him from disparaging Western treatments, part of which involved the question of Muḥammad's miracles. As Andrew Rippin explains, whether miracles attributed to Prophet Muhammad could "be accounted for by rational scientific explanations" became one of the repeated motifs in modern biographies of the Prophet.[513] Among the most prominent modernists who denied miracles altogether, including for Muḥammad, were the Indian writer, Sir Sayyed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) and the Egyptian, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal (1888-1956).[514]

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[513] Rippin, *Muslims*, 201.

[514] Khan and Haykal are but representative samples of a wider debate that took place in much of the Islamic world. Their respective regions, India and Egypt, were hotbeds for this debate, alongside other regions, notably Syria and Turkey. For coverage of other regions, see Itzchak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity, Sufism, Salafiyya, and Arabism in Late Ottoman Damascus* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); the studies in *Intellectuals in the Modern Islamic* World, eds. Stéphane A. Dudoignon, Komatsu Hisao, and Kosugi Yasuhi. For the issue of materialism in particular, see M. Sait Özervah, "Alternative Approaches to Modernization in the Late Ottoman Period: İzmirli İsmail Hakkı's Religious Thought Against Materialist Scientism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 39 (2007): 77-102.

Khan, living in an India colonized by the British Empire, "admired the modern scientific civilization on which Britain's supremacy and prosperity rested,"[515] and this positive assessment of modern science directly impacted his exegetical methods which resulted in rejecting that the Qur'an admitted miracles. As explained by Johanna Pink, Khan's rejection of the supernatural "constituted a direct response to prove the compatibility of the Qur'ān with reason and science, both of which were...considered positive forces intimately connected with Western modernity and indispensable progress."[516] In other words, Khan's rejection of miracles was part of a project to promote the advancement of Islamic society along the patterns of Western modernization, with the denial of the supernatural understood as an integral part of this process. Further, in rejecting miracles, Khan was also attempting to rebuff the scathing criticisms certain orientalists lodged at the perceived irrationalities of Muslims.[517]

For Khan, the universe is "uniformly governed" by inviolable laws of nature, which are "potentially ascertained by reason."[518] His argument for the inviolability of the laws of nature is grounded in a theology which sees the causal processes of the phenomenal world as the "work of God," and analogizes God's *works* with God's *words*; as he explains, both "the words of God" and "the creation of God," the perfection of

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[515] Rotraud Wielandt, "Main Trends of Islamic Theological Thought from the Late Nineteenth Century to Present Times," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, 713.
[516] Johanna Pink, "Striving for a New Exegesis of the Qur'ān," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, 771
[517] Khan's thesis has been linked not just to the general zeitgeist of his time, but also to works of certain prominent orientalists like William Muir (1819-1905), a committed Christian and colonial administrator in British India who, in his *The Life of Mahomet from Original Sources*, severely criticized Muslim attribution of miracles to Muhammad. Muir's career, as explained by Ali, "intertwined evangelism, Orientalist scholarship, and service to the empire." See Ali, *Lives of Muhammad*, 49. For more on the polemics in Muir's work and Muslim reactions to it, see Christian W. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1978), 177; Ali, *Lives of Muhammad*, 49-71 and *passim*; and Khalidi, *Images of Muhammad*, 249-256, 270-271.
[518] Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 175.

which is indicated in the Qur'ān, "are two synonyms which means that no changes occur in nature."[519] Just as God promises to keep his word, so too as He promised a consistency in His creative work of nature. To clarify, Khan understands that God has made verbal promises in the Qur'ān which axiomatically, we accept that He will never break; further, given certain assurances in the Qur'ān,[520] God has also promised consistency in the laws of nature, "the infringement of which would equal the infringement of God's verbal promise, which cannot happen."[521] As such, there can be no exceptions to the laws of nature. More besides, these laws of nature are discoverable, and while human reason had not yet arrived at all of the laws of nature, it had at least arrived at some, and "some of them are well ascertained to an extent of infallibility."[522] Given these principles, verses which ostensibly speak to miracles in the Qur'ān must be read in such a way that negates the "supernatural."[523]

Like Khan, the Egyptian writer Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ḥaykal (1888-1956), in his *The Life of Muḥammad*,[524] aimed at responding to Western denigrations of Muslims, their narratives about the Prophet, and the Prophet himself. Achieving this purpose required

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[519] Muhammad Daud Rahbar, "Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khān's Principles of Exegesis: Translated from his *Taḥrīr fī ūṣūl al-Tafsīr*," *The Muslim World* 46, no. 4 (1956): 108.
[520] Among them, that God has "created everything in due measure" (Q 54:49), and "You shall not find any alteration in the course of God" (Q 33:62). There is of course nothing obvious about these verses affirming inalterable laws of nature in the modern understanding.
[521] Troll, *Sayyid Ahmed Khan*, 176.
[522] Rahbar, "Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khān's Principles," 109; Khan also mentions that there are some laws which have long been known to human reason, and which he reads as corroborated by the Qur'ān, among them, that humans are born from pairs—male and female (implying a denial of the miraculous Virgin Birth).
[523] Rahbar, "Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khān," 110-111; Khan uses the English word "supernatural" in this work. The upshot of Khan's strategy is to explain ostensible miracles to agree with modern science as he understands it (such as to psychologize the famous Ascent of Muhammad so that it is spiritual, and not a physical journey), or to read them as allegories.
[524] Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal, *Ḥayāt Muḥammad*, 14th ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 2002); Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal, *The Life of Muḥammad*, trans. Isma'il al-Faruqi (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 2005).

freeing Muḥammad's life from the shackles of traditions that promoted a wonder-working prophet—he would have to eliminate "any elements deemed superstitious or in error according to the modern sensibility."[525] His chosen approach to achieve this aim was to present a biography consistent with western standards of "objectivity" and which also appreciates the fruits of modern science.[526] Thus, as Smith explains, Haykal allows himself "to examine Muhammad's life according to Western scientific methods with the goal of correcting traditional accounts."[527] Through a selective application of the historical-critical method, he could arrive at presenting extra-Qur'anic narratives as accretions, pious fictions which lacked historical basis. As he saw it, Muslims had all too happily come to accept extra-Qur'ānic materials such that one can trace the steady growth of miracles attributed to Muḥammad over time. In fact, he observes, there is a noticeable progression in how farfetched the traditions become over time, with the alleged miracles becoming more credulity-stretching over the generations. This was largely due to Muslims retreating from the intellectual rigor of their forebearers over time (again, this is a common refrain in Islamic reformist discourse). He lambastes Muslim writers of the past for accepting incredulous narratives; they relished in the appeal of wonder, so that the more miracles the Prophet was said to have displayed, the more Muslims would be devoted to him.[528] As opposed to the traditional biographers, his biography, committed to an "objective" method unswayed by a bias for the wonderous,

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[525] Rippin, *Muslims*, 205.
[526] His motives are elaborated in his introduction to the second edition of his *Life*, which appears in Haykal, *Ḥayāt Muḥammad*, 43-80. On Haykal's work, see Charles D. Smith, *Islam and the Search for Social Order in Modern Egypt: A Biography of Muhammad Husayn Haikal* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1983), 113-125. For his work in comparison to that of other contemporaries, see Khalidi, *Images of Muhammad*, 273-95; and, Ali, *Lives of Muhammad*, 93-113.
[527] Smith, *Biography of Muhammad Husayn Haikal* 114.
[528] Haykal, *Ḥayāt Muḥammad*, 70.

would only accept those traditions which confirmed with the Qur'ān *and* laws of nature in presenting the Prophet's biography.[529] In this, one can already sense Haykal's strategy with respect to Qur'ānic verses said to affirm miracles for Muḥammad: like Khan, his reading of such verses will derive from a hermeneutic that assumes the supernatural as unacceptable; as such, one must turn to alternative interpretations of such verses. By way of example, again like Khan, Haykal depicts Muḥammad's Night Journey and Ascent as a spiritual as opposed to a physical experience. Moreover, Haykal sees it fit to demonstrate that the possibility of such a spiritual experience is confirmed by modern science, such as by appealing to new knowledge on the transmission of invisible radio waves over long distance; such realities, he argues, demonstrate the possibility of Muḥammad's *immaterial* spirt traveling from Mecca to Jerusalem in one night.[530] That Haykal is pressed to buttress the possibility of a visionary experience by modern science goes far to illustrate the stranglehold of modern science in his era, and the extent to which it could define the contours of what one could claim to know or accept as plausible.

As we will see shortly, the likes of Khan and Haykal did not go unchallenged, but this was due in part to the threat they posed as formidable competitors to traditionalist thought. In other words, the activities of the modernists were a force to be reckoned with. For his part, in 1875, Khan founded the tellingly named Muhammadan Anglo Oriental

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[529] Haykal, *Hayāt*, 69. As one would expect, Haykal's methods were still informed by his commitment to certain Islamic ideals and did not directly reflect the historical-critical method as commonly deployed in the West; his application of the western historical-method is thus a selective one. On this point, see Rippin, *Muslims*, 205.

[530] His discussion on the Journey and Ascent appears in Haykal, *Ḥayāt Muḥammad*, 202-209. See also, Smith, *Biography of Haikal*, 125. Importantly, Haykal's depiction avoids sapping the incident of all feeling; the event is presented as a spiritual experience in which Muḥammad grasps the "unity of being in all its totality and perfection;' the affair is depicted in deeply emotive language which recall Sufistic imaginations of the incident. See al-Faruqi's translation of this section in Haykal, *Life of Muḥammad*, trans. Al-Faruqi, 144-145; echoes of Sufism in Haykal's presentation is noted in Smith, 125.

College in Aligargh, which was based on educational models of Oxford and Cambridge, the first Muslim institution of its kind in India. Beyond this, he began the modernist Aligarh Movement in India,[531] named after the location of his college. The influence of Khan went well beyond the Subcontinent; for his works and activities, Khan "enjoyed widespread popularity among Islamic modernists" internationally, and he was praised for prominent figures, not least of which was perhaps the most influential of the modernists in Egypt, Rashid Riḍā, whose influence was felt in many corners of the Islamic world.[532] Indeed, Khan's college "quickly became a space of engagement where Islamic modernists from Egypt and the Levant interacted with the college's intellectual circles, European orientalists, and British officials." [533] As for Haykal in Egypt, the first edition of his *Life* reportedly sold "ten thousand copies within six months of publication," and received "generally favorable though restrained" reviews from his peers.[534] No-less prominent a figure than Shaykh al-Maraghi, who by 1935, was for the second time, Shaykh al-Azhar (rector of Al-Azhar), provided his own flattering introduction to Haykal's work. Al-Azhar was, and remains, the most prominent Islamic educational institution in Egypt, and in premodernity, was the most famous of such institutions internationally. That its rector would praise and pen an introduction to Haykal's work speaks to the considerable reach of ongoing debates concerning what path Islam in modernity would take—it is telling that the most public representative of what was once a

[531] On which, see David Lelyveld, "Disenchantment at Aligarh: Islam and the Realm of the Secular in Late Nineteenth Century India," *Die Welt des Islams* 22, no. 1-4 (1982): 85-102.
[532] Roy Bar Sadeh, "Islamic Modernism Between Colonialism and Orientalism: *al-Manār*'s Intellectual Circles and Aligarh's Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College, 1898-1914," in *The Muslim Reception of European Orientalism: Reversing the Gaze*, eds. Susannah Heschel and Umar Ryad (New York: Routledge, 2019), 103
[533] Sadeh, "Islamic Modernism," 103.
[534] Smith, *Biography of Haikal*, 118.

bastion for traditional Islamic thought should approve and support a biography of the Prophet which rejected widely accepted extra-Qur'ānic accounts and denied supernatural acts *in toto* for the Prophet. Indeed, Smith is likely correct in stating that al-Marāghī's laudatory introduction might have been "a factor limiting the number of critical reviews by devout Muslims."[535]

Yet, the rejection of miracles for Muḥammad was not met well by scholars of a more traditionalist bent, nor it would seem, by many from the populace. The perceived threat to traditionalism which Khan represented resulted in multiple objections to his work from traditionalist Muslims, one of which accused him of being a heretic who belonged to a "new naturist sect."[536] This was a reference to the centrality of "nature," in the modern sense, in Khan's writings, which resulted in him and his colleagues in his movement being branded as materialists who disbelieved in any reality beyond the material world. In relation to this was the curious case of the modernist Jamal al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838-1897), who during a visit to India, and upon request from a teacher in Hyderabad, also penned a condemnation of Khan in which the Indian scholar was accused of atheistic materialism;[537] al-Afghānī was an important reformist in his own

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[535] Smith, 118; al-Azhar University took part in debates on the nature and fate of Islamic thought in modernity; by the early twentieth century, al-Azhar had become a major source of Islamic reformist thinking, as reflected by al-Marāghī's position (although scholars from al-Azhar were not exclusively reformist). For more on the role this university played in Islamic reform, see Rainer Brunner, "Education, politics, and the Struggle for Intellectual Leadership: Al-Azhar Between 1927-1945," in *Guardians of Faith in Modern Times: 'Ulama' in the Middle East*, ed. Meir Hatina (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 109-140; Meir Hatina, "Historical Legacy and the Challenge of Modernity in the Middle East: The Cast of al-Azhar in Egypt," *The Muslim World* 93, no. 1 (2003): 51-68; Said F. Hassan, "Al-Azhar: The Challenge of Reforming Religious Education in Egypt," in *Education and the Arabic Spring: Resistance, Reform, and Democracy*, eds. Eid Mohamed, Hannah R. Gerber, and Slimane Aboulkacem (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2016), 129-149.

[536] Masud, "Islamic Modernism," 243.

[537] Masud, 243-244; Lelyveld, "Disenchantment at Aligargh," 83-84. Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, "The Truth about the Neicheri Sect and an Explanation of the Neichiris," in Nikki R. Keddie (trans.), *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamāl ad-Dīn "al-Afghānī* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 130-174.

right,[538] who in another critique of Khan, empathizes with the desire for a "renewer" that "will appear and will reform the minds and souls of the Muslims, repel the unforeseen corruption, and educate them with a virtuous education."[539] Yet for all his reformism, al-Afghānī could not compromise on accepting miracles. For al-Afghānī, "Muslim belief in miracles and an afterlife would be the best form of resistance against imperialism and cultural demonization."[540] Thus, speaking of Khan, he wrote, "Does he not understand that if the Muslims, in their current state of weakness and misery, did not believe in miracles and hell-fire...they undoubtedly would soon abandon their own weak and conquered camp, and attach themselves to a powerful conqueror."[541] For al-Afghānī, and not without reason, cultural supremacy went hand in hand with its political counterpart, so that to adopt Western thinking wholesale would expose Muslims to continuing subjugation under the West.[542] Indeed, some interpreters of al-Afghānī have argued that the beliefs defended in al-Afghani's refutation of Khan on this point did not reflect his own convictions and that contradictions in his teachings betray an anti-egalitarianism whereby he separated the elite from the masses and assumed the latter required certain aspects of traditional religion to resist western domination.[543]

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[538] On al-Afghānī, see Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 109-129; Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism*, 1-97.
[539] Al-Afghānī, "Commentary on the Commentator," in Keddie (trans.), *An Islamic Response to Imperialism*, 125.
[540] Rudi Mathee, "Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and the Egyptian National Debate," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 21, no. 2 (1989): 160.
[541] Al-Afghānī, "Commentary on the Commentator," 127.
[542] In the refutation, al-Afghanī directly associates Khan's theology with his loyalty to the British; Khan was infamous for his support for Indian cooperation with the British, which is perhaps most exemplified by his support for the Raj during the Indian Mutiny of 1857. Al-Afghanī's opposition to Khan was largely due to his commitment to a growing pan-Islamic movement against Western forces, and in turn, to his perception of Khan as a coconspirator with the enemy. For this assessment of al-Afghanī's motives, see Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism*, 22ff.
[543] See Mathee, "Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī," 160.

Whatever the case may be, the rejection to prophetic miracles represented in Khan was challenged from various corners, and Haykal too, experienced much the same. While as aforementioned, Haykal's *Life of Muhammad*, first published in 1933, was well-received by many scholars, including the Shaykh al-Azhar, the concerns addressed in his introduction to the second edition, published in 1936, demonstrate considerable resistance to his work. His reflections clearly show that the most widespread objection to his work came in the form of criticism against his stance on prophetic miracles. In response, after defending his approach to show the inadmissibility of extra-Qur'ānic material which purport miracles for Muḥamamd, he then appeals to the authority of certain figures, among them the aforementioned al-Marāghī, as reinforcements. To this end, Haykal requotes al-Marāghī's comments on this matter, which appear in his introduction to the work's first edition: "Muhammad...had only one irresistible miracle—the Qur'ān, and it is a *rational* miracle."[544] Further he quotes the fellow modernist, Rashīd Rīḍā (who ahd been active in Egypt), now deceased at that time, as speaking in defense of Haykal's view on miracles. Riḍā's comments are worth quoting at length:

> The most significant and recurring objection which Azharī [scholars] and the Ṣūfīs raise against Haykal concern the matter of miracles, which I have analyzed in my book, *al-Waḥyī al-Muḥammadī* [The Muḥammadan Revelation] from all angles in the second section...wherein I established definitively that the Qur'ān alone is God's unimpeachable proof for establishing the prophethood of Muḥammad...and that miracles which defy the laws of nature (*al-khawāriq al-kawniyyah*) are doubtful and cannot stand as proof.[545]

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[544] Haykal *Ḥayāt Muḥammad*, 69; for the context in which this appears in the original introduction, see Haykal, 13.

[545] Haykal, 69; the original comment appears within a review and discussion of Haykal's *Life* by Riḍā in his own journal. See Rashīd Riḍā, "*Ḥayāt Muḥamamd Ṣāllā Allāhu ʿalayhi wa Sallam, al-Ḥukmu bayna al-Mukhtalifīn fīhi*," *Majāllat al-Manār* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Manār, 1935), 34:787.

Haykal's purpose in quoting Riḍā is of course, to show, after presenting his own reasons for arriving at his conclusions, that other respected figures have similar views. However, Rīḍā's comments are also useful for other purposes: they demonstrate for us that Haykal's thinking inspired such controversy that a like-minded figure in the form of Riḍā had to come to his defense in a separate journal.

Moreover, accepting Riḍā's testimony, he also confirms that indeed among all criticisms, objections to Haykal's views on miracles were the most "significant and recurring," and that objectors came not just from the masses, but also from scholarly corners, not least of which were Azharī scholars, the very institute at which the approving al-Maraghī served as headmaster. Such reflections illustrate the uncertainty concerning miracles that emerged in intellectual circles. Yet, even for those who wanted to maintain the occurrence of prophetical miracles, the force of modern science *in tandem with* the attending bedfellow of Western colonialism, was such that one could not simply ignore the challenge this posed to tradition as reflected in miracles, no matter where one stood on this matter. Thus, in his analysis of a cohort of biographers seeking to maintain prophetical miracles, Khalidi writes on one of these figures, "there can be no mistaking the intellectual turmoil generated by the urgency to defend the miracles of the *Sira* [the Prophet's Biography] against the march of modern science, seemingly relentless, atheistic, empirical, and now, indeed, colonial."[546] As we saw in al-Afghanī, defending miracles was not simply a matter of protecting true belief; beyond this, the modern defense of miracles arouse within the context of conflict with Western thought so that

[546] Khalidi, *Images of Muhammad*, 272.

even for the reformist, al-Afghānī, belief in miracles served as a tool for resisting Western cultural domination.

Beyond addressing prophetical miracles, given the attack of modern science on the supernatural generally, the saintly miracles also became an object of criticism in the modern era, and moreover, they became a stand in for Sufi extremism in the eyes of many Muslim thinkers. Among the ideological challenges brought on by the onslaught of modernity in the Islamic world, it was the centrality of Sufism in Muslim life and thought that was arguably most threatened. As poignantly expressed by Itzchak Weissman, "Sufism is the major sacrifice offered by Islam on the altar of its modernization in the past century and a half."[547] Many Islamic modernists increasingly found the source of Muslim weakness in the domination of Sufism and its associated popular beliefs. Sufism, they argued, hindered the progress of Islamic societies by preaching the submission of individual thought to that of the spiritual masters, and by propagating superstitious, "irrational" beliefs. They thus criticized Ṣūfīs for uncritical acceptance of saintly authority and traditional teachings. To circumscribe the authority of saints, critics also targeted *karāmāt* as an important source of this authority.

It was hardly possible to deny the *karāmāt* in toto, as such categorical rejection was relegated to the ways of the heretical Muʿtazilah of yesteryear. However, as with some of our early Sunnī commentators, anxious observants of modern Islamic society also sought to confine the number of miracles accepted. Thus, the renowned reformer,

[547] Itzchak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity, Sufism, Salafiyya, and Arabism in Late Ottoman Damascus* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 260. Throughout his work, Weismann's discussion brilliantly unpacks certain threats to Sufism from within: the modern state, the modern middle class, and Islamic Modernism.

Rashīd Riḍā (1865-1935),[548] published a series on the *karāmāt* in his periodical, *al-Manār*, in which he addresses the dangers of uncritically accepting *karāmāt* attributed to saints. Rashīd Riḍā himself came from a traditional scholarly background, and like most scholars of his age, was attracted to Sufism in his youth.[549] According to his own testimony, in his youth, he traversed the Ṣūfī path and gave himself over to severe Ṣūfī disciplines with the hopes of initiating into a Ṣūfī order (the Naqshabandiyyah). Ironically, he also reports extraordinary experiences in this period, including visions of future events, and the ability to heal the sick. In time however, he was dismayed by the excesses of Sufism he observed as he frequented Ṣūfī circles, and eventually turned away from Sufism and towards the nascent modernist movement of his day. In all societies throughout history, he argues, there have always been those who claimed miracles for themselves, and who thereby, gained authority over their communities, and some of them even attained a level of divinity in the eyes of the people.[550] Islamic history is not free of this human tendency, and so care must be taken with respect to how claimants to miracles are approached.

While affirming that not all narratives of miracles are false, Rīḍā explains that some are nonetheless fabrications, invented by those invested in the saint's acclaim, such as the saint himself, his family, or successors. Then, there are other "miracles" which while not being false, are in reality, not necessarily supernatural. For example, predictions which come true, or a saint's answered prayers, might simply be due to

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[548] On whose reaction to Sufism in general, see the chapter on "Sufism and Modern Islam: Rashid Rida" in Albert Hourani, *The Emergence of the Modern Middle East* (Berkeley: UCLA Press, 1981), 90-102.
[549] See Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis: The Defence, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World* (London: Routledge, 1999), 98-102.
[550] Rashīd Riḍā, "*Karāmāt al-Awliyā'*," *Majāllat al-Manār* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Manār, 1899), 2:401.

coincidence. Further, echoing the seventh/thirteenth century scholar, Ibn Taymiyyah, Radhīd Riḍā adds that supernatural events also occur for sinners, unbelievers, and sorcerers alike, so that a *karāmah* in and of itself cannot be assumed to speak to the subjective realities of its beneficiary. As Riḍā explains, "if you see a man flying, do not place any confidence in him until you know whether or not he obeys the *sharīʿah*."[551]

Where Riḍā and other reformers like Muḥammad Abduh (d. 1905) strove against Ṣufī excesses in Egypt,[552] in Russia, this concern fell most prominently to Rizaeddin bin Fakhreddin (1858-1936) of Tatarstan, [553] who in the first decade of the 1900s, had already acquired "the status of one of the most outstanding spokesmen for the reformist trend" in Muslim Russian circles.[554] much like Abduh, Fakhreddin saw in popular beliefs, a source of cultural malaise which exposed Muslims to subjugation; thus, he writes, "while the Muslim world remained idle and superstitions replaced divine belief, enemies seized the opportunity and attacked Islam from all sides."[555] Fakhreddin, like Riḍā, sought to tread a moderate path in his criticism of Sufim; while critiquing practices and beliefs he took as heterodox, he nevertheless "remained close to modernized forms of Sufism."[556] Yet, he had a certain ire reserved for popular beliefs concerning sainthood which, like many of

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[551] Riḍā, translated in Hourani, *Modern Middle East*, 97.
[552] Like Riḍā, the equally influential Salafī, Muhammad ʿAbduh (d. 1905), sought to problematize *karāmāt*, arguing that Muslims were not obligated to accept any specific miracle after the time of the Companions, and left assessment of reports on miracles to the discretion of each individual. See Muhammad ʿAbduh, *The Theology of Unity*, trans. Isḥāq Musaʿad and Kenneth Cragg (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1966), 157-8; Brown, "Faithful Dissenters," 124.
[553] Fakhreddin was a prolific and accomplished scholar, most notably associated with the Islamic reform movement in Soviet Russia, the Jadidist movement. On his activities and teachings, see Stéphane A. Dudoignon, "Echoes to *al-Manār* among the Muslims of the Russian Empire: A Preliminary Research Note on Riza al-Din b. Fakhr al-Din and the Šūrā (1908-1918)" in *Intellectuals in the Modern Islamic* World, 85-116.
[554] Dudoignon, "Echoes to *al-Manār*, 99.
[555] Rizaeddin bin Fakhreddin, "Ibn Taymiyyah," trans. Ahmet Kanlidere, in *Modernist Islam (1840*-1940), ed. Charles Kurzman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 239.
[556] Dudoignon, "Echoes to *al-Manār*," 99.

his modernist contemporaries, he saw as resulting from accretions to Islam which postdate Muḥammad. Thus, he wrote that over time, Muslims invented the concept of sainthood, which the Prophet never spoke of, and then some were bestowed with this title, with some further bestowed with even more special titles like "master of two worlds" (i.e., heaven and earth), "the best of all creation," and "the pole of the universe." Then, people "surrendered themselves to such persons," and "began to submit their wishes to these saints, requesting help from their spirits in humble supplication."[557] Such superstitions led the masses to develop a fascination with supposedly saintly personalities, and, he argues, distracted them from giving investigation of the natural world its due. The hold of this obsession with the supernatural was such that even in the wake of colonialism, Muslims could not even arise to an awareness of the source of their poor condition. As he explains, "their spirit could not awake, as its illnesses had become ingrained...They drank, one after another, the wine of somnolence, and even asked for more."[558] Fakhreddin's perspective on the state of Islam at his time is one of patent disappointment, and his acerbic tone is perhaps part of a strategic move to arouse his reader to certain harsh truths felt by Fakhreddin. Thus, he states that when Muslims "heard the sound of the Europeans' canons," instead of rising to effective action, they fled to "the tombs of their ancestors, spirits, and religious leaders...Rather than seeking help from God alone...they sought help from dead people."[559]

The absurdity of the reliance which Muslims had on saints, for Fakhreddin, was most exemplified by the belief in saintly miracles. He places blame for the explosion of

[557] Fakhreddin, "Ibn Taymiyyah," 239.
[558] Fakhreddin, "Ibn Taymiyyah," 240.
[559] Fakhreddin, 240.

miracle narratives in Islamic history squarely at the hands of a sainthood economy by which certain individuals benefited from the invention of sainthood, and so, promulgated miracle narratives for that purpose. As sainthood progressed, sites associated with saints, such as tombs, became a source of living, and so they became "filled with miracle sellers and peddlers of saintly intercession." Thus, miracles were invented to corroborate the greatness of saints; "in order to gain fame and earn more worldly profit, as much exaggeration as possible is needed."[560] It would seem that Fakhreddin goes further than Riḍā in his condemnation of karāmāt; where Riḍā only cautioned against credulously accepting miracle narratives without basis, while still accepting their possible occurrence (at least theoretically), Fakhreddin seems to deny *karāmāt* altogether when he states that the even the great pioneers of Sufism would not have recognized, nor consented to the miracles attributed to them.[561] Thus, at least one scholar of Fakhreddin's opus has it that Fakhreddin held miracles as exclusive to the Prophet Muḥammad alone.[562]

To be fair, Ṣūfīs did not only face opposition from modernist reformists; there were also those whose reformism took a more conservative turn, and who criticized longstanding traditions to present an Islam with very little to no admiration for Western thought. This opposition came from the corner of Salafis.[563] Muḥammad al-Albānī (1914-

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[560] Fakhreddin, 240.
[561] Fakhreddin, 240-241.
[562] Dudoignon, "Echoes to *al-Manār*, 99; unfortunately, I am unable to confirm this conclusion as Fakhreddin wrote in Turkic, which lies beyond my linguistic competence.
[563] Because Salafism is based in a purism which seeks a "return" to the ways of the earliest predecessors, there has been much confusion surrounding the term. It has been used to refer to various reformist movements with conflicting, even contradictory positions. For one, it has been used for the likes of Rashīd Riḍā, who incorporated modern Western thought (even if cautiously) into their conception of Islam; yet, it is also identified with conservative Salafism on the opposite end of the spectrum which espoused aversion to modernization. Here, I follow Emad Hamdeh in identifying the latter camp with the Salafis, and the former with the Modernists. See Emad Hamdeh, *Salafism and Traditionalism: Scholarly Authority in Modern Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); see also Simeon Evstatiev, "Salafism as a Contested Concept," in *Knowledge, Authority and Change in Islamic Societies*, eds. Allen James Fromherz and Nadav Samin (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 172-201.

1999), among the pioneers of modern Salafism, and perhaps with the widest appeal in Salafī popular circles,[564] speaks of the problem with exaggeration in *karāmāt* narratives. In his commentary on the well-regarded Sunnī Creed of al-Ṭaḥāwī (d. 321/933), he capitalizes on al-Ṭaḥāwī's claim that the body of Sunnī Muslims confesses the *karāmāt* which have been established by *sound* transmission; al-Albānī speaks approvingly of this point, and then highlights the caveat placed by al-Ṭaḥāwī: Muslims are only obliged to accept only those *karāmāt* which are *soundly* transmitted. Al-Albānī then argues that over time, Muslims have become excessively relaxed and accepting with regard to *karāmāt* narratives, to the point that they have come to report, "in the name" of *karāmāt*, fictions, the falsehood of which not even those with the slightest amount of intellect would doubt. One example of the fictious *karāmāt* tales he references is a statement supposedly mentioned in the Ṣūfī work of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī (d. 973/1565), *Ṭabaqāt al-Awliyā'* (the Ranks of the Friends), in which a saint is said to have stated the following: "I abstained from saying, 'Be, and so it is!' for twenty years, out of respect for God on High in His being far removed from what the wrongdoers (i.e., polytheists) say about Him." What is implied is that the Saint would find that things would manifest at His uttering the phrase, "Be, and so it is," a phrase attributed to God in His creative activity; out of respect for the Divine, the Saint refrains from encroaching on God's domain by blocking any proximity to the polytheist claim that any other God could share in the act of creation; to this end, he abstains from employing his saintly powers to materialize things. For al-Albānī it is inconceivable that any individual could possess such power in

[564] On Albanī, see Stéphane Lecroix, "Between Revolution and Apoliticism: Nasir al-Din al-Albani and his Impact on the Shaping of Contemporary Salafism," in *Global Salaifsm: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 58-80; Hamdeh, *Salafism and Traditionalism*, 39-58, and *passim*.

the first place. [565] Though al-Albanī disagreed with modernists on the place of reason in defining theology, it is worth noting that for a time, prior to turning to Salafism, al-Albānī adhered to the reformist tradition of the modernists, and that it was from that school that "he inherited his hostility to Sufism and popular Islam."[566]

As is clear from the above, the place of miracles in modernity became a matter of controversy, due in no small part to the compelling nature of modern science which was incompatible with the existence of supernatural phenomena. In the face of such opposition, many Ṣūfīs in modernity doubled-down in defending *karāmāt*, the most vigorous among them being Yusūf al-Nabhānī (d. 1932). In his two-volume work, *Jāmiʿ Karāmāt al-Awliyā* (Compendium on the Saintly Miracles),[567] which collects saintly miracles reported throughout the generations to his day, the scholar argues that God has made Islam superior to other religions by virtue of the miracles He has provided His people throughout Islam's history; he further seeks to defend Islam against the onslaught of heretical innovation, unbelief, and falsehood, including in the form of those who would deny miracles.[568] In this work, al-Nabhānī addresses the old, now revived objection that accepting the plethora or miracles reported in Islamic history would render all miracles meaningless.[569] If we recall, for such critics, miracles, by definition, are violations of the habitual course of nature and so, should Muslims become habituated to

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[565] Abū Jaʿfar Aḥmad al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Matn al-ʿAqīdah al-Ṭaḥāwiyyah,* ed. Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1414/1993), 84.
[566] Lecroix, "al-Albānī," 64.
[567] Yūsuf Ibn Ismāʿīl al-Nabhānī*, Jāmiʿ Karāmāt al-Awliyā'*, 2 vols, ed. Ibrahīm ʿIwād (Gujrat, India: Markaz-Ahl-e-Sunnat- Barkat-e-Raza, 2001)
[568] On this work, see Heidi Ford, "Constructing Sanctity: Miracles, Saints, and Gender in Yusuf ibn Ismāʿīl al-Nabhānī's *Jāmiʿ karāmāt al-awliyā*," PhD diss. (Indiana University, 2000), 14-15.
[569] Even some staunch defenders of Sufism in modernity criticized what they saw as uncritical acceptance of miracle stories. One example of this concern among some Sufis is the Moroccan scholar, ʿAbd Allāh al-Ghumārī (d. 1967). See Brown, "Faithful Dissenters," 159-164.

miracles, they would lose their wonder, for they would no longer be extraordinary. To this, al-Nabhānī explains that the *awliyā'* are few, relative to the rest of humankind so that even if every *walī* was able to produce a miracle, their rarity would mean that their miracles remain uncommon. In other words, they would always present as departures from the norm, as extraordinary.[570] Yet, as Brown notes, al-Nabhānī's descriptions of saints in his own time significantly blunts his argument. The longest entry in his work presents the miracles of one ʿAlī al-ʿUmarī from Trablus, with whom the author was familiar, identifying him as "our Shaykh." [571] Al-Nabhānī writes that not only was al-ʿUmarī the most famous of the Saints of his age, he was also gifted with the most miracles, of all types. Thus he states,

> "...my eyes have not seen, nor have my ears heard of any of the Friends of God, neither in this time nor many centuries before, at whose hands God has manifested as many miracles and supernatural phenomena (*khawāriq al-ʿādāt*) as with Shaykh al-ʿUmarī, neither in abundance, nor in wonder, nor in variety of kind."[572]

Indeed, not even the miracles of the most privileged among the saints, including the Axes (*aqṭāb*), compare to those of al-ʿUmarī. So common was it that those who came into his company would see miracles manifest at his hands that for such individuals, the extraordinary became ordinary; in fact, he states, al-ʿUmarī's miracles became so commonplace that some around him failed to notice his sainthood altogether—that is, he so often produced miracles that some of his contemporaries could no longer distinguish

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[570] Brown, "Faithful Dissenters," 154; al-Nabhnānī, *Jāmiʿ*, 1:23. Note that Brown refers to a different edition of al-Nabhānī's work which was not available to me. My citations to the *Jāmīʿ* refer to the Markaz Ahl-e-Sunnat edition cited above.
[571] al-Nabhānī, 2:386
[572] Al-Nabhānī, 2:387; see also Brown, "Faithful Dissenters," 154

the miraculous from the ordinary.[573] The irony here is that while al-Nabhānī states in the same work that the extraordinary nature of the *karāmāt* solidifies their role in inspiring awe so that through them, God marks out His special friends, in the same work, he devotes two volumes to chronicling the marvels of over a thousand saints throughout Islam's history, not least of whom was al-ʿUmarī, whose audience came to see his miracles as par for the course; in so doing, al-Nabhānī throws his assurances on the extraordinariness of *karāmāt* into question.[574]

6.3 Summary of Findings

In this work, I have attempted to explain how the *awliyā'* and their *karāmāt* grew in prominence in the early centuries of Islamic history, and especially from the third/ninth-fifth/eleventh centuries. Taking Islam as a discursive tradition in the Asadian sense, where knowledge production and creedal formation is primarily negotiated through readings of authoritative texts (in this case, Qur'ān and oral reports, including *ḥadīth*). I have relied primary on Sunnī and Muʿtazilī polemics on *wilāyah* and *karāmah* to explore the controversy surrounding the increasing prominence of the *awliyā'* over the course of the first five centuries of Islam. I have also sought to demonstrate how these texts help us appreciate the place of *wilāyah* and *karāmah* in social life. In Chapter Two, I demonstrated the importance that evidentiary miracles came to play in Islamic prophetology, which later paved the way for the importance of miracles in Sunni doctrine

[573] al-Nabhānī, 2:388. Al-Nabhānī goes on to censure those who, in spite of witnessing al-ʿUmarī's miracles first hand, still refuse to accept them as such; in his conversations with them, they reveal that they are willing to recognize al-ʿUmarī's actions as wondrous in some way, but cannot take them as *karāmāt*; for them, while God does have certain select Friends, it is not for us to know who they are so that humans would give them distinction thereby, and so, God does not publicize them with miracles. Ultimately, al-Nabhānī says, their stubbornness in refusing to identify his miracles is simply because they are unwilling to recognize al-ʿUmarī's sainthood.

[574] Brown, "Faithful Dissenters," 154.

on *wilāyah*. I then advanced the position that the *awliyā'* came to fill a void felt by the absence of the Prophet, and demonstrated how this was expressed through emerging *ḥadīth* on the *awliyā'* (Chapter Three). Muslims understood that prophets had been strongholds of the earth, and with Muḥammad signaling the end of prophethood, Muslims were faced with the question of what would become of the earth and its inhabitants along with it in the Prophet's absence. In the process of addressing such anxieties, traditions on the indispensable presence of the *awliyā'*, which were attributed to the Prophet, his companions, and respected personalities of subsequent generations, began to circulate, thereby sanctioning through the authority of such figures, developing conceptions of extra-Prophetic charisma found in the *awliyā'*. These traditions presented the *awliyā* as exemplars who ascend to the rank of intimacy with God through their disciplined cultivation of moral character. Further, the traditions speak to the awareness of a saintly hierarchy, with an elect few sitting at the highest echelons, on whose behalf, chaos within, and destruction of the world is stayed.

Because the *awliyā'* essentially came to ensure a continuation of charismatic authority on earth after the Prophet, they were often molded on the Prophet. As I explain in Chapter Four, *wilāyah* was often directly analogized with prophethood: like the prophets, the *awliyā'* share an intimacy with God that provides them direct access to the divine; an extension of this is that not only do the *awliyā'* have an intimate knowledge of God, but more, God imparts upon them knowledge from Himself directly without the mediation of ratiocination; again, the divine inspiration (*ilhām*) of the Saints is made an analog to the divine revelation (*waḥy*) of the prophets. Finally, this intimacy and access to direct knowledge meant that the *awliyā'*, which were identified with the Ṣūfī masters,

were the rightful heirs to prophetic authority on earth. It was they that should be looked to for spiritual guidance, as opposed to those masters of other Islamic disciplines. Further, there were traditions which affirmed that God would protect the honor of the *awliyā'* and avenge against those who insulted or harmed them; such traditions were marshalled, most exemplified in al-Tirmidhī, in vigorously defending the unparalleled authority of the *awliyā'*.

As we saw, Sunnī apologies for their formulations of *wilāyah* were part of a wider competition between scholars of the various Islamic disciplines for position in Islamic society. Further, the charismata of the *awiliyā'* was a foundational component of how *wilāyah* was conceived, as evidenced by Sunnī apologies for their acceptance (Chapter Five). The urgency with which our Ṣūfī works defended saintly authority shows they were not simply defending against theoretical objections, but rather, against vocalized objections to the ascendancy of the *awliyā'* in their time (Chapters Four and Five). In Chapter Four, I kept objections to the Sunnī discourse on *karāmah* in the background, and then brought them to the fore in Chapter Five, wherein I compared Sunnī arguments for *karāmah* against Muʿtazilī discourse. Through these analyses, I have sought to further our understanding of the increasingly pervasive presence of popular wonder-working saints in early Islamic history, the role Sufism played in propagating this phenomenon, and the anxieties that this gave rise to for Muʿtazilī critics.

The integration of Sufism into mainstream Sunnī thought, and its domination in Muslim life, beginning towards the end of the fifth/tenth century, has long been

documented.[575] By the middle of the sixth/thirteen century, Sufism had "spread wide across Islamdom, around the Mediterranean as well as the Mesopotamian-Iranian area into Central and South Asia,"[576] and had shifted from "its early spiritual elitism into a movement among the masses."[577] As Karamustafa explains, Sufism "spread through the whole social canvas of pre-modern Islamic societies, from political elites to wage-earners in urban centers to peasants and nomads in the countryside."[578] This occurred through a wider process which saw the creation of the ideal scholar as one who displayed mastery in both the exoteric (jurisprudence, speculative theology, and the like) and esoteric disciplines, as exemplified in the person of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, famously called "the Proof of Islām," (*ḥujjat al-islām*) for his contributions to Sunnī apologetics.

The dominance of Sufism involved increased attention to the *baraka* ("spiritual power") of Sainthood (*wilāyah*), which was increasingly monopolized by the Ṣūfīs.[579] It was understood that the *awliyā'* were graced with *barakah*, "a fluid force that emanated from the saint, and permeated the places, persons and objects around him," the ultimate proof of which was the *karāmah*,[580] and that one could draw from this *barakah* by drawing close to the *walī* and or material objects connected thereto. Drawing from the *barakah* of a saint was essentially a form of mediation between the individual and God,

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[575] For brief surveys on this process, see Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam Volume Two*, esp. chapters on "Maturity and Dialogue among the Intellectual Traditions, c. 945-1111" (152-200) and "The Victory of the New Sunnī Internationalism, 1118-1258" (255-191); see also, Ira Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*,156-182; and more recently, Babak Rahimi and Armando Salvatore, "The Crystallization and Expansiveness of Sufi Networks within the Urban-Rural-Nomadic," in *The Wiley Black History of Islam*, eds. Armando Salvatore, Babak Rahimi, and Roberto Tottoli (Oxford: Wiley, 2018), 253-272.
[576] Rahimi and Salvatory, "Sufi Networks," 268.
[577] David Waines, *An Introduction to Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 146.
[578] Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, 264.
[579] As discussed in Chapter 3 of this work, it was only over time that the Sufīs came to dominate sainthood; earlier, *wilāyah* could be associated with all sorts of pious groups: ascetics, devout traditionists, and the like. This is evident in the affirmation of *wilāyah* by those traditionists of the 2nd/8th and 3rd/9th centuries who transmitted reports on *wilāyah*, though they predated the development of Sufism proper.
[580] Karamustafa, *The Formative Period of Sufism*, 130.

which would then enable the fulfillment of needs: material, emotional, spiritual. Because this *baraka* was taught to persist after the death of the *walī*, there arose a cult of saints which took center stage by the sixth/twelfth century. The grave sites of the *awliyā'* became sites for approximating the Divine as objects of pilgrimage and intercession, culminating in the development of tomb pilgrimage (*ziyārah*) as a ritual performance in and of itself.[581] This was not a marginal development, or a part of "folk religion," but rather, was recognized at all echelons of society, including at the scholarly level. Thus, the sixth/eleventh century Ḥanbalī theologian, Ibn Qudāmah (541-620/1146-1223), writes affirmingly that the *awliyā'* "are a refuge to men when events afflict them: for kings, and others of lesser rank, seek their visits (*ziyārah*), regarding their supplications to God as a means of obtaining blessings, and asking them to intercede for them with God."[582] Given the belief in *baraka*, Muslims were increasingly attracted to the personality of the Ṣūfī Shaykh, who became the main attraction to Sufism.[583] Indeed, even the Muʿtazilah,

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[581] Excellent sources for the place of *ziyārah* in medieval Islamic society include Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous* (1999), Josef Meri, *Cult of the Saints* (2002), Ephrat, *Spiritual Wayfarers* (2010), Vincent Cornell, *Realm of the Saint* (2010). For an earlier summary of this development in Islam broadly, see Ignaz Goldziher, "On the Veneration of the Dead in Paganism and Islam," in *Muslim Studies*, ed. S.M. Stern (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1967), 229-238.

[582] Ibn Qudāma, *Censure of Speculative Theology*, trans. Makdisi, pp. 10-11, fn. 23 & 24. Closely associated with the Ḥanbalī school of jurisprudence was an identified Ḥanbalī tendency in theology. Both the legal and the theology schools take as their sources of inspiration the 3rd/9th century traditionist, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbā (d. 241/855), whom we cited repeatedly in Chapter 2. Appropriate to the eponym, both Hanbālī jurisprudence and Ḥanbalī theology is marked by a desire for strict scripturalism which easily lent itself to literalism. For example, this school a preference to accepting corporeal depictions of God as true without interpreting them as metaphorical, as opposed to the dominant Ashʿarī school, which for example, read God's "hands", as a reference to His power. On Ḥanbalī theology, see Jon Hoover, "Ḥanbalī Theology," in *The Oxford Book of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 628-646. Given the scripturalist conservatism of the Ḥanbalī school, Sunni aversion to popular practices tended to come from their circles, as demonstrated below. However, that even some Ḥanbalīs were susceptible to the general trend towards accepting popular veneration of the saints, such as with Ibn Qudāma, is a testament to the success of Sufism.

[583] Riazul Islam in his study on South Asian Sufism, argues that the "entire attention" of the common disciple "was focused on the person of the Shaikh" as opposed to "the principles, let alone the ideals, of the *Silsila* [spiritual chain]." See Raizul Islam, *Sufism in South Asia: Impact on Fourteenth Century Muslim Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 424-425.

notorious for their rejection of the *karāmāt*, would soon join the mainstream. Abū al-Husayn al-Baṣrī (d. 426/1044), himself a student of ʿAbd al-Jabbār, is said to have accepted them.[584] By the end of the 6th/12th century, we are told by a Muʿtazilī writer, Taqī al-Dīn Mukhtār al-Najrānī ((d. late 6th/12th or early 7th/13th) that most of the Muʿtazilah have come to accept the possibility of miracles, in consort with the remaining factions of the Muslims.[585]

6.4 Avenues for future research

Throughout the twentieth century, Ṣūfī communities continued to believe in, and circulate miracle stories of their masters, and the few focused studies on twenty-first Sufism indicate that this remains the case throughout the Islamic world.[586] However, though *karāmāt* theoretically remains unchallenged within Sunnism, its place in the lived experience of Muslims has diminished substantially. With the decentering of Sufism throughout the twentieth century, the veneration of the *awliyā'* has been relegated to the margins of popular worship in many regions, and elsewhere where it retains considerable influence, it is but one of many other competing expressions of worship—in other words,

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[584] al-Malāḥimī, *Al-fā'iq fī ūṣūl al-Dīn*, 374; importantly, al-Malāḥimī (d. 536/1141) himself, a Muʿtazilī in thought, supports *karāmāt*.

[585] Taqī al-Dīn Mukhtār al-Najrānī, *al-Kāmil fī al-Istiqṣā' fī mā Balaghana min Kalām al-Qudamā',* ed. Muḥammad al-Shāhid (Cairo: al-Majlis al-Aʿalā li-l-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyyah, 1999), 354; on the author, see the editor's introduction (10-44).

[586] For case studies of Sufi communities wherein ascribing *karāmāt* to masters persisted, see the following: for Pakistan, and specifically 20th and 21st century masters of the Chishti order, Robert Rozenhal, *Islamic Sufism Unbound: Politics and Piety in Twenty-First Century Pakistan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), especially, pp. 55-56, 71-72, 84-85, 97, 144.; on the legacy of a certain 14th century saint in present-day North Jakarta, including miracles prompted by his shrine in the twenty-first century, see Teren Sevea, "Sufism, Miracles and Oceanic Fatwas: The Beloved of North Jakarta," *Journal of Sufī Studies* 11, no. 1 (2022), 74-114. The various works of Paulo Pinto on Syrian Sufism, based on his anthropological studies in that region, have shown the continuous importance of miracles for Sufism there. See especially, Paulo Pinto, "Knowledge and Miracles: Modes of Charisma in Syrian Sufism," in *The Anthropology of Religious Charisma: Ecstasies and Institutions*, ed. Charles Lindhoml (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 59-77.; Pinto, "Mystical bodies/unruly Bodies: Experience, Empowerment and Subjectification in Syrian Sufism," *Social Compass* 63, no. 2 (2016), 197-212.

its privilege over other Muslim currents is no longer assumed for the most part (barring certain few exceptions). As such, the fate of Sufism and the nature of *wilāyah* in the Islamic world remains an open subject of inquiry. One suspects that the force of modern disenchantment might continue to exert its influence such that the expectation of *karāmah* in the here and now might continue to diminish. There might be indications that the present century shows a growing tendency toward consigning the miracles of the saints to the epistemological category (spiritual "insight," clairvoyance, and the like.); alternatively, those miracles which involve ruptures of physics as we know it seem more and more relegated to the past. A reduction of emphasis on *karāmāt* in the present, or in the quest for *karāmāt* that improve one's material conditions, is indicated in a few studies on twenty-first century Sufism. In these cases, the Sufīs studied seem to delight more in propagating stories of the miraculous from generations that precede them, than in propagating the miracles of their living masters.[587] We will have to await future studies to better understand whether this reflects a trend, or whether these are anomalous.

Returning to the past, there's much yet to be understood of how Sufism came to dominate Muslim life. In this thesis, I have turned toward the earlier part in this process and have emphasized the role of formal polemics in legitimizing Ṣūfī concepts, with the

[587] Admittedly, my reflections here are partly based on intuition and personal interactions with contemporary Sufi communities. However, consider the case discussed in Sevea, "Sufism, Miracles, and Ocianic Fatwas," 74-114. The twenty-first century "miracles" associated with the 12/18th century figure Habīb Hussein al-ʿAydarus (d. 1169/1756) pale in comparison to those miracles associated with him from the distant past. Whereas al-ʿAydarus is said to have effected healings and caused rain to fall during droughts in the past. The same scholar, in the twenty-first, is renowned for his apparitions which blessed an Islamist politician against secularist parties. Another recent study shows the active attempts of Sufi reformists in a Macedonian Roma neighborhood to demystify an iconic ritual associated with their order, which involved body wounding without harm (the famous *zarf* of the Rifāʿīyyah order). These reformists exposed these practices as resulting from nothing more than manipulation and illusion. Galina Oustinova-Stjepanovic, "A Ritual Demystified: The Work of Anti-wonder among Sufi Reformists and Traditionalists in a Macedonian Roma Neighborhood." *Religion and Society: Advances in Research* 10, no. 1 (2019), 30-43. There is also the case of al-Ghumārī, discussed above

understanding that the textual tradition was crucial to this development. Josef Meri on the other hand, observes that the immediate reasons for prominence of the *awliyā'*, especially in the middle period, "were social and spiritual and in practical terms had little to do with the formulation of doctrines of sainthood, creeds, or the circulation of traditions concerning the Prophet's miracles."[588] As I admit and hope to have demonstrated, the activities of the populace were central to the prominence of the *awliyā'*, so it is true that we must not overemphasize the works of the intelligentsia in bringing Sufism to the fore. Yet, I would quibble with underestimating the place of scholarly activity in advancing the case of the *walī*; as we have seen, besides the abstract writings of the theologians, the role of Ṣūfī scholars as public preachers was also instrumental in bringing about Ṣūfī dominance. Yet, while I would dispute Meri's claim that the social prominence of Sufī personalities had "little to do" with theological disputations, Meri is right to emphasize social angle. Future studies will no doubt benefit from considering the symbiotic relationship between the populace and those in positions of authority, and it is hoped that my analysis of the polemical works on *karāmāt* which I have explored, alongside the social anxieties embedded in their subtext, will serve the wider project of elucidating the nature of this symbiosis in Islamic social and intellectual history.

[588] Meri, *Cult of the Saints*, 71.

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